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CPA Practice Advisor

Today's Technology for Tomorrow's Firm

DECEMBER 2021
VOLUME 31
NUMBER 11

BRIDGING THE GAP: 6 Tips for Managing Technostress

Gearing Up for Tax Season

FEATURE: Evaluating the New Tax Season Normal

THE STAFFING & HR ADVISOR: How a Learning Culture Can Transform Your Practice

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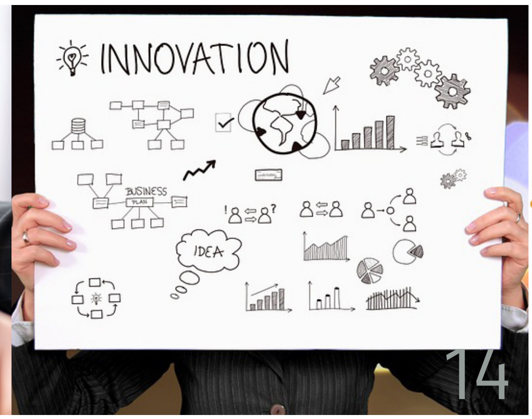

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Your Personal Enrichment Schedule for 2022

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IF YOU HAVEN'T done so already, try being proactive with your plans for growth in 2022. This might sound like a variation on the traditional New Year's resolutions, and perhaps it is, but it seems that, too often, we squeeze in our learning and improvement as an afterthought when we have a bit of time to kill or when we're up against the wall to fill in our CPE hours.

We start the new year, busy season takes hold, then we make some time to relax in the summer, we get busy in the fall again and prepare for family gatherings, and the year-end approaches and we're back to the start of another cycle.

Instead, how about taking some time right now to think about how you want to better yourself in the next year, and then actually schedule that education intentionally? Your plans can take several forms.

- Stay on top of legislation, standards, and other developments that impact the work you do regularly. This can take the form of reading certain publications and following news sources, taking CPE classes, attending conferences, and connecting with your state and national professional societies and organizations.
- Learn new skills to improve or expand the services you offer to clients. Whether you take classes online or in person, or use self-study programs, or even intern yourself to a mentor, it's never too late to expand your skillset so that you can do your job, or even your life, better.
- Read to add to your knowledge. Schedule real time for regular reading – books, magazines, newsletters, websites – whatever sources you prefer. If you don't set aside time regularly to read, it's easy for you to procrastinate and then never get around to it.
- Share knowledge with others. Plan frequent meetings with your friends and colleagues and learn from each other. Practice what you have learned.

If you start now, you can lay out your self-improvement schedule for 2022 and actually get this schedule on your calendar. Make a list of what you want to learn in the year ahead, seek out the resources where that information can be found, and then create your educational program. Sign up for the events and classes you plan to attend and set aside time each week for your learning activities.

Next, think about how you plan to use your new knowledge. Will you change the services you offer to clients? If so, plan for how and when that will happen and add implementation steps to your calendar. Will you expand your group of personal contacts to include those from whom you can learn? If that's your plan, decide who that will include and how you will alter your relationships with these people.

Picture yourself a year from now, looking back on the past year and looking forward to a future that includes your new-found knowledge. You can make the choices right now for how and in what ways you will improve and take the steps to make those choices a reality.

Meanwhile, the staff at *CPA Practice Advisor* wishes all of you a happy and safe holiday season. ■

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Evaluating the New Tax Season Normal for Tax Advisors

By Jim Guarino, CPA, PFS, CFP®, MST

I WAS RECENTLY asked if I thought the upcoming tax season will represent a return to normal for tax advisors and their clients. To be honest, I thought, "What's normal anymore?" If normal can be defined as adapting to perpetual change, then the answer is an emphatic "YES!" Or, as New York Yankees legend Yogi Berra once said, "It's like déjà vu all over again."

In fact, I contend the 2018 tax season was perhaps the last "normal" busy season encountered by tax professionals (2017 tax returns were filed based on pre-Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 tax law). Since then, each subsequent tax season has been demanding, challenging and for some tax professionals, career-altering…a bit more on that later. All tax professionals have been impacted. Perhaps the only tax season attribute that can be considered "normal" for tax advisors nowadays is to expect the unexpected.

When I reflect back on recent tax seasons it is quickly apparent how chaotic it has been to be a tax professional since the passage of TCJA.

For example, the 2019 tax season involved the first busy season filing (2018) tax returns under the new TCJA tax rules and with it, a significantly revamped Form 1040. Not only were tax advisors dealing with interpreting new tax law (arguably, the most significant since the Tax Reform Act of 1986) but also new tax forms. This was occurring while TCJA tax law integration was still being processed by the Internal Revenue Service. As a result, many client tax returns were extended and submitted at the October 15th filing deadline, rather than the standard April 15th deadline.

I suspect the 2020 and 2021 tax filing seasons need no further explanation other than to mention COVID-19 and the wave of tax law legislation (CARES Act) that was rapidly passed to deal with pandemic-related strains on businesses and individuals. Initially, tax advisors were required to learn, interpret and implement new tax law on the fly just as the 2020 busy season was hitting full stride in March. Adding to this was the extension of the traditional April 15th due date to July 15th and busy season 2020 morphed well into the summer vacation months. And the 2021 busy season was slightly less tumultuous but not without its own share of pandemic-related adjustments, including another April 15th deadline that was extended through May 17th for this past year.

Simply put, after the past three tax seasons, many tax professionals are exhausted and drained. The effects are sobering. The profession is seeing escalated levels of attrition at all non-partner ranks, and the pipeline of first-year staff entrants into the field seems to get smaller each year. Rather than aspiring to be promoted to tax partner, younger tax professionals are questioning if a career as a tax advisor in public practice is sustainable and whether work-life balance is realistic.

The partner group is not immune from the consequences of the past three tax seasons either. Many experienced practitioners have re-evaluated their own circumstances. Some have opted to retire earlier than planned and others have abandoned their own succession plan (including patiently grooming the next generation tax advisor) and instead have sought out merger opportunities with other firms.

So, how do we reverse this trend? The solution might be one of the few positives that emerged from the pandemic: The enhanced use of technology and a remote/hybrid work environment. Similar to many other service providers, tax advisors needed to adapt to a new normal as a result of the pandemic. For the tax profession, that meant pivoting to a remote office environment, integrating a hybrid workforce and implementing a near 100% virtual tax engagement service model for clients in just a matter of weeks.

Clients have adapted to this new normal as well. Individuals appear to be getting more involved with their own tax planning and seeking tax advisors who are conversant with legislative changes and tax saving strategies. Clients understand the impact of saving taxes. They want to work with tax advisors who remain knowledgeable about tax law, regardless of how complex it becomes or how frequently it may change. Personally, this is what makes being a tax advisor so fulfilling for me – answering the challenge of each busy season, be it a normal tax season or some iteration thereof.

Bringing this discussion full circle then, the hope is that this upcoming tax season will be a bit more traditional, in effect, more normal. Tax advisors and their clients are now accustomed to the

routines of remote work, Zoom calls and paperless tax preparation services.

To successfully navigate this coming tax season, we need to continue to embrace the changes that we all made to provide tax services in the first year of COVID-19. We also need to ensure we are continuing to engage our clients about their tax and financial situation, even when we're communicating remotely. A strong relationship between advisors and clients has always been critical to success.

As we approach the end of 2021, we are again confronting developments that have recently become all too familiar. The world is once again feeling anxiety over another COVID-19 variant and potential new tax legislation is being considered and debated by Congress. Buckle-up fellow tax practitioners for another year-end of busy season anticipation… as the saying goes, the more things change, the more they stay the same. As Yogi said, it really does feel like déjà vu all over again. ■

Jim Guarino, CPA, is a managing director at Baker Newman Noyes. He specializes in serving high net worth individuals and families as well as closely held businesses and their owners.

Gearin

By Mike D'Avolio, CPA, JD

HOPEFULLY, TAX PROFESSIONALS won't have to face the same challenges they have experienced the last two tax seasons, such as COVID-19 virus surges, extended tax seasons and extra work (e.g. Paycheck Protection Plan loans). However, we expect practitioners to be quite busy given the number of tax changes. The following article discusses some of the issues and opportunities for accountants heading into tax season.

TAX LAW CHANGES

The following is a list of some of the higher impact tax law changes for tax year 2021.

The third round of Economic Impact Payments arrived last spring and these payments will need to be reconciled on the 2021 tax return (similar to 2020).

The Child Tax Credit is more generous than in the past.

- Children under 18 years old are covered (instead of children under 17 years old).
- The credit is fully refundable (instead of partially refundable).
- The credit amount is $3,000 and $3,600 for children under 6 years old (instead of $2,000).
- Monthly advance payments have been available between July 2021 - December 2021 and the advance payments are reconciled on the 2021 tax return.

The Child and Dependent Care Credit is more generous than in the past.

- The expense limit is $8,000 for one child (instead of $3,000) and $16,000 for two children (instead of $6,000).
- The credit percentage is 50% (instead of 35%).
- There are higher income phase-out amounts.
- The credit is now refundable.

The rules for the Earned Income Credit are more relaxed.

- The credit is more generous for taxpayers without children.
- There is a look back provision where you can use earned income from 2019 if it's more beneficial.

The Tuition and Fees Deduction for college education has been repealed.

- However, you can still claim the American opportunity credit and the lifetime learning credit instead.

You can deduct 100% of Business Meal Expenses (instead of 50%).

STAFFING CONCERNS

According to a survey, finding qualified staff was the top issue for every firm-size segment except sole practitioners, and most expect staffing to continue being a top issue in the next five years.

And why is that?

- Significant regulatory changes increase the need for constant training.
- Historically, firms supplement staffing with short-term seasonal hiring. But, as technology becomes more crucial in our workflow, onboarding and training seasonal hires can be difficult.
- Not all clients embrace technology and will submit their documentation in different fashions (paper v. electronic), and this creates complexity.
- Changing client needs alters the demands and expectations firms have for staff, requiring a delicate balance between customer service, strategic, and technology skills.

g Up for Tax Season

However, remote work provides another opportunity to bring in talent, and expand your client base outside of current boundaries with more clients willing to virtually work with their tax professional. So while there are definite challenges with staffing, if you're willing to adapt to the changes, your firm can grow and benefit significantly.

ADOPTING ADVISORY SERVICES

We're seeing a shift in the tax profession from leading with compliance services to leading with advisory services, such as offering tax planning strategies and business consulting. Offering advisory services provides an opportunity to showcase and differentiate your expertise while helping clients reach their financial goals. Professionals are leveraging technology and automation in tax, accounting, and payroll compliance to create capacity to offer advisory services. Increased efficiency in a practice can free up time to devote to higher value services.

Advisory services can also improve a practitioner's work / life balance and can have a more significant impact on your clients' financial well-being. It is important for firm managers to:

- Learn how to value and price advisory services,
- Easily navigate and build advisory service plans for a range of clients, and
- Identify the tools you need to add and grow advisory services.

EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY

It's so important to embrace technology to streamline compliance work and give you and your firm more time to meet with clients, provide advisory services and more. There are technologies out there that can help you with flexibility, remote work and more.

- A hosted solution for your desktop applications provides better security and automatic backups and updates. Plus, an online solution provides for flexibility of the cloud with nothing to download.
- Electronic signatures are more efficient by allowing you to get your client documents signed remotely.
- Client portals allow you to engage with your clients and collect / organize source documents remotely.
- Cloud-based, online accounting software allows for collaboration and real time changes between accountant and client.
- A cloud-based practice management solution helps you better manage and organize your work, clients and staff.

PANDEMIC CONCERNS

Continue to work in a safe environment for yourself, your staff and clients. Everyone's comfort levels are different, and the climate is continually changing with new variants, surges and more. Keep these things in mind when working to build a safe space:

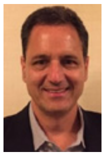
- For in-person meetings, consider social distancing, facemasks, vaccinations, testing, and safety equipment.
- Think about using a remote environment for staff and clients by leveraging technology, such as cloud-based solutions, electronic signatures and client portals.

BEST PRACTICES

As it is with every tax year, don't forget the basic best practices. It's been a busy few years, but there are always ways you can make it easier by being prepared and remembering some of the basics.

- Educate yourself on the upcoming tax law and tax form changes early on. The more educated and prepared you are, the better advisor you'll be for clients and the easier the season will be.
- Adequately train your staff about tax changes and office systems and processes. It's not only important that you're prepared, but that everyone on your staff is as well.
- Be sure to account for the tax changes when sending out client organizers, meeting with clients and preparing tax returns.
- Think about posting some of the tax changes in newsletters or on your firm's website to educate clients and bring in new business.
- Send out your client organizers early and remind your clients to retain their source documents.
- Challenge your firm to become more efficient by going paperless, streamlining operations and trying out new software or applications.

As I've said, it's been a difficult time for tax professionals the last few years, but with some preparation and a good attitude, you can be ready for another successful tax season! ■



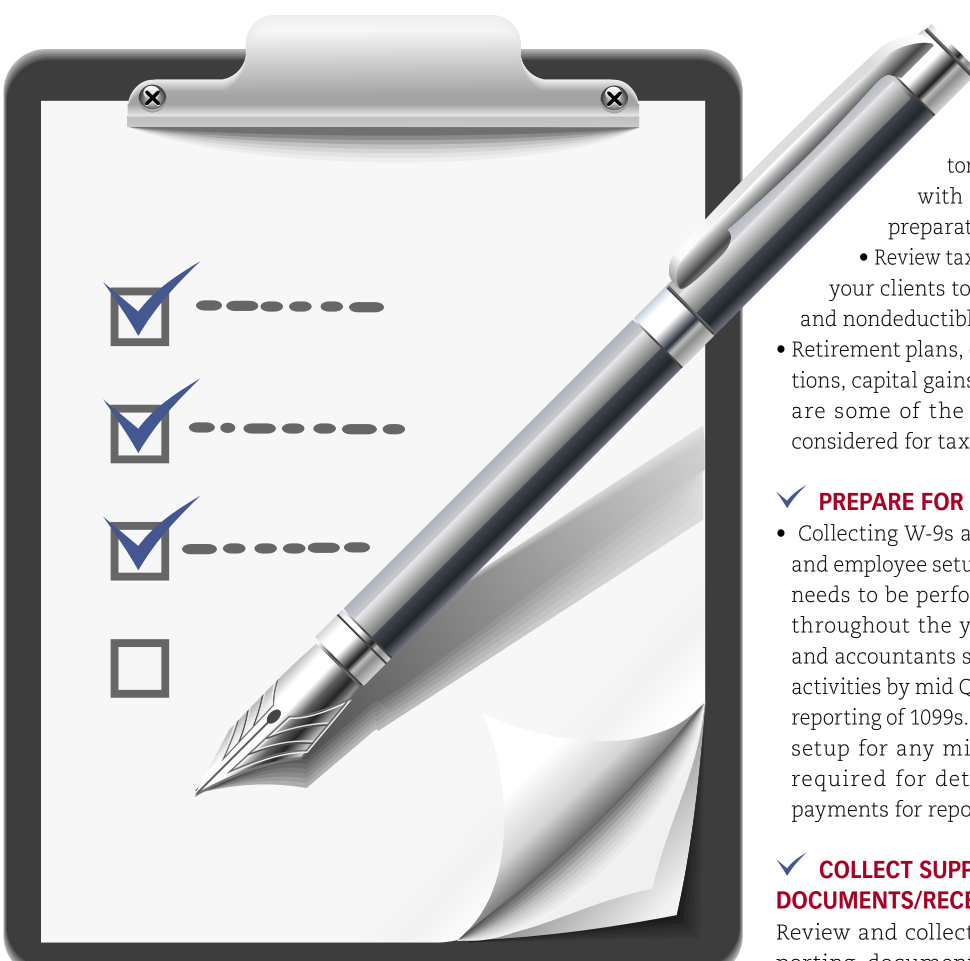
Mike D'Avolio, CPA, JD, is tax law specialist and staff program manager, ProConnect Group, Intuit. He is a customer and employee instructor, customer and government liaison, and a public relations representative.

Checklist for End-of-Year Activities with Clients

By Bhairavi Parikh, CPA

AS WE MARCH toward the end of another challenging year, the question remains, are we prepared for a glitch-free wrap of the business year? Along with tax and accounting, there are some tax, compliance, legal, information technology, and HR-related tasks that are necessary to be completed for a smooth transition into the new financial year.

To ensure stress-free financial close, here is a compilation of checklists to be reviewed with your clients.



TAX:

✓ CREATE AND REVIEW THE TAX PREPARATION PACKAGE

- Once financial statements are reviewed and finalized, it is essential to compile a package with standard and customized reports, along with workpapers for tax preparation.
- Review tax package needs with your clients to identify deductible and nondeductible expenses.
- Retirement plans, charitable contributions, capital gains, and distributions, are some of the other items to be considered for tax preparation.

✓ PREPARE FOR REPORTING 1099S

- Collecting W-9s and W-4s for vendor and employee setup is an activity that needs to be performed continuously throughout the year. Most tax pros and accountants start data scrubbing activities by mid Q4 to ensure smooth reporting of 1099s. Review each vendor setup for any missing information required for determining eligible payments for reporting purposes.

✓ COLLECT SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS/RECEIPTS

Review and collect any missing supporting documents by year-end to verify the accuracy of accounting treatments and prepare the books for any audits.

COMPLIANCE:

✓ REVIEW LICENSE RENEWAL REQUIREMENTS

- Business licenses, such as sales tax, city licenses, and any other industry-specific specialty licenses or permits can require renewals. Review any such requirements with your clients to confirm compliance.
- Educate your clients about patents, copyrights, and trademarks to help them create and protect intellectual properties.

✓ FILE ARTICLES OF AMENDMENT

- Based on business structure, there may be annual requirements to file articles of amendments in case of any changes to a business address, name, purpose, and/or members during the year.

✓ FILE AN ANNUAL REPORT

- Based on business structure, there may be annual requirements to file an annual report and hold board meetings. Remind your clients about this to ensure compliance.

✓ FILE FOR ENTITY CONVERSION

- The past couple of years have been economically challenging for most business owners and required them to change their entity structure. Any changes in business structure require careful consideration. Every state has specific documentation and filing requirements from the compliance perspective.

ACCOUNTING:

✓ CONFIRM AND RECORD ADJUSTING JOURNAL ENTRIES

- Remind your clients to conduct a year-end physical inventory count to record necessary adjustments based on variances.
- Review and confirm large purchases for necessary capitalization. Remind clients of fixed asset count, and record necessary adjustments based on variances.
- Review aged accounts receivable balances for possible write-offs or collection steps.
- Review aged accounts payable balances for possible adjustments.
- Review other current liabilities, including payroll and sales tax, to reconcile and or make timely adjustments.
- Confirm loan balances to record the necessary split of principal and interest.
- Review personal vs. business nature of transactions to confirm proper classification.
- Research and ensure proper accounting treatment of funds received under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

✓ RECONCILE ACCOUNTS

- Reconciling all the balance sheet accounts is at top of the year-end closing checklist.
- Reconcile bank and credit cards accounts to ensure that accounting transactions match bank and credit card statements.
- Reconcile prepaid insurance and payroll accrual account balances to achieve compliance with accounting standards.
- Reconcile revenue account where point of sale applications are used to record revenue.

✓ REVIEW FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

- Prepare comparative balance sheet statements to analyze variances. This will help clients measure growth.
- Prepare trending and comparative income statements to review with clients. This will not only ensure proper classification of business income and expenses, but also confirm any gaps in recurring transactions or any abnormal expenses.

✓ ANALYZE CASH FLOW STATEMENTS

- Prepare annual cash flow statements to confirm net changes in cash. Current changes in the economy driven by COVID-19 enforce a need to put close control over cash liquidity.
- Review cash outflows and inflows with your clients to identify and confirm the trends. This will help identify outliers, if any.

✓ COMPARE BUDGET VS ACTUALS

- Prepare comparative reports to review variances between actual and budgeted numbers. This helps business owners measure targets and adjust the budget for next year.
- Comparing budget and actuals also helps to analyze individual department or cost center performance to prepare proper allocations.

✓ LOCK THE PERIOD

- Once all the accounting adjustments are recorded based on the review of the records with your client, it is very important to lock the accounting period to avoid any back-dated changes to accounting records. The financial statements will be used for tax preparation.

HR AND BENEFITS:

✓ REVIEW PTO POLICIES AND ADJUST BALANCES

- If your client has employees who are eligible for vacation and sick time, it is important to remind them to review personal time off (PTO) policies closely. There may be restrictions to carry forward accumulated balances that may require accounting adjustments.
- Review and reconcile any PTO balances that may require any liability adjustments.

✓ CONFIRM BONUS, INCENTIVES, OR COMMISSION RELATED REQUIREMENTS

- If your client has employees who are eligible for bonuses, incentives, or commissions, it is important to calculate year-end payouts based on respective policies.
- Year end is also a good time to review and make changes to policies based on employee performance. The compensation plan should be reviewed and adjusted on an annual basis.

✓ EVALUATE EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND APPRECIATION PROGRAMS

- Employee recognition is an effective way to communicate that efforts and hard work contribute to the success of the company. It helps your team understand company values and culture. Most companies arrange annual meetings to give employee awards.
- Several other ways to show employee appreciation include sending personalized holiday gifts, sponsoring family dinners and getaways, and offering extended time off.

✓ REVIEW RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

- The end of the year is the ideal time to analyze employee turnovers and resource requirements that need to be adjusted based on the revised budget and adjusted business plan.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY:

✓ GENERATE NECESSARY BACKUP FILES

- It is essential to keep backups of all important data. Download all the important workpapers, contacts, files, and reports to secure loss of data in case of any disasters or data breaches.

✓ CLEAN UP AND ARCHIVE REDUNDANT FILES

- When we are too focused on ensuring accurate bookkeeping and data maintenance, we can unknowingly start hoarding data. It is essential to schedule a time to clean up unnecessary data and update your data retention policies.

✓ EVALUATE AND RECONSIDER YOUR TECH STACK

- In an ever-evolving technologically advanced age, it is hard to keep up with every update. However, it is important to create a year-end checklist to confirm your server requirements, review your security policies, and reconsider your tech stack. There is always a possibility for a faster, better, and cheaper application being available for your businesses.

Closing a business year can be a stressful period for us and our clients. By creating a customized workflow and following a checklist, you can avoid year-end burnout. Good luck! ■

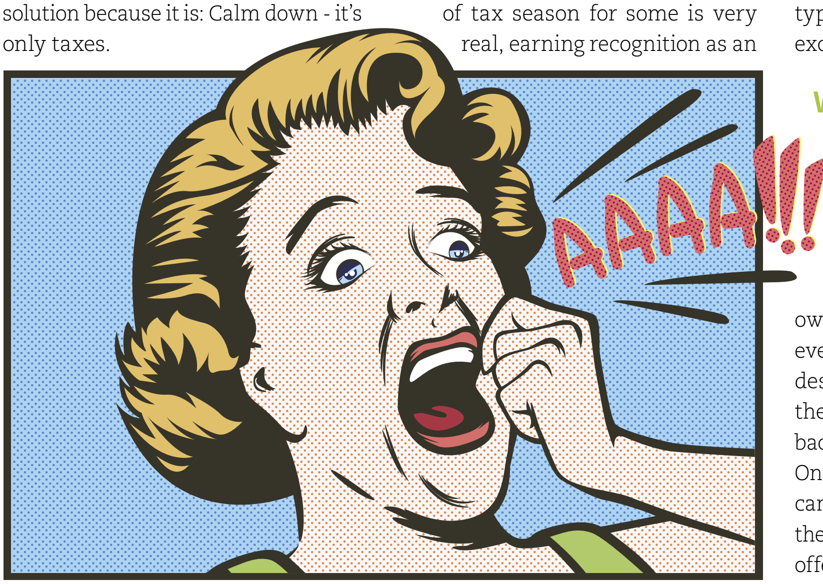
Bhairavi Parikh, CPA, is a fractional CFO and consulting controller for Analytix Solutions. With more than 15 years of experience in public and private accounting, Parikh is well versed in managerial accounting and CFO services for small- to mid-size organizations. After earning her CPA designation in 2004, she spent four years leading a team that was responsible for the internal audit, and internal and external financial reporting for a company with annual revenues in excess of $3 billion. Find Parikh on Twitter @ Bhairavi_CPA.

Calm Down - It's Only Taxes

By Ernie Villany, CPA

WE'RE ALL FAMILIAR with the old "death and taxes" saying. It's true that both are an inevitable part of life, and both are dreaded by most. Clients have a tendency to get anxious about filing their taxes, despite knowing tax season comes at the same time year after year.

For many clients, there's a sense of impending doom and an irrational fear to avoid the IRS' prying eyes. Yet for something so routine, taxes seem to have a way of throwing off even the most resolute among us. As a professional working in the field of accounting for more than 30 years, I've learned a thing or two about taxes and the all-encompassing fear that surrounds them. I've spent years acting as both a CPA and an unlicensed therapist for my clients. Thankfully, I've picked up some helpful advice and tips designed to reduce the level of anxiety associated with tax return filing. I like to start with a little secret I share with all of my clients. It sounds like a simple solution because it is: Calm down - it's only taxes.



Read on to hear about some of the most common fears our clients have, along with some coping strategies from an unlicensed therapist that help guide them to the other side of the filing deadlines completely unscathed. A little bit of humor is always welcome. My own approach with clients reminds me of an unforgettable line I once heard an experienced cable car conductor give a female passenger as we were headed down Hyde Street Hill in San Francisco: "Lady, just relax. And don't jump unless you see me jump first."

FOROSOPHOBIA: FEAR OF TAXES AND THE IRS

If you weren't already aware, the fear of tax season for some is very real, earning recognition as an official phobia, forosophobia—otherwise known as the fear of taxes and the IRS. This phobia has common side effects that plague our clients every year, including procrastination and avoidant behaviors, extreme anxiety, and even feelings of helplessness. But like most other phobias, the fear of taxes and the IRS is born from an irrational place and can be confronted and overcome with the right mindset and tools.

AUDITS!

First and foremost, make sure your clients understand that audits and other tax-related government correspondence are rare events, as fewer than 2% of individual returns are audited. Of course, receiving a notice that you're being audited can be cause for concern, but only if you've committed willful violations of the tax code in an effort to conceal, deceive, or defraud the IRS. Communicate to your clients that over three quarters of all tax examinations (audits) are typically cleared up with a routine exchange of letters.

WHAT IF I CAN'T PAY ON TIME?

If your clients aren't aware, let them know that 80% or more of recent filers were either due a refund or didn't owe taxes. And that the inability to pay what they owe or on time is a low probability event. You can reassure them that, despite the unearned reputation, the IRS doesn't operate like a bookie backed by an organized crime outfit. On the rare occasions where accounts can't be settled by the due date, share their options in requesting extensions, offers in compromise, and even payment plans (with interest, of course).

MISTAKES & ASSOCIATED PENALTIES

Unless they've previously won a Fields Medal (for mathematics), tell your clients that they can be excused for making a mathematical error on their taxes. Be up front and honest with them about any associated penalties but do your best to request a waiver if the situation warrants it.

HOW TO DEAL

The clients we work with have a lot on their minds. We all do. But providing them with reassuring advice that builds a lasting trust is one of my favorite aspects of the job. Dealing with anxious clients is among the most professional of problems to have. So, act like it. Hold face-to-face sessions, as you're able—even over Zoom. Live up to the level of personable service you promised to win their business. Listen more than you speak and, when you do, provide them with professional advice that further establishes your bond of trust. Always use your emotional intelligence to provide an empathetic viewpoint.

Taxes are hard. That's why most clients leave it to the professionals. Let's all do our part to live up to the label. ■

Ernie Villany, CPA is the founder and president of Boulder Valley CPAs (BVCPAs), a Colorado-based CPA/advisory firm representing clientele in 30 states. Villany has over 30 years of experience in public accounting, helping small to medium-size businesses around the world plan and manage their financial growth, while mitigating tax liabilities.

How to be Proactive vs. Reactionary as a Tax Pro

By Jasen Stine and Robbie Randall

ONE OF THE biggest complaints from clients is that their tax pros react to their problems only when the house is on fire. And on the other hand, tax pros can get frustrated when clients only come to them at tax season. There is a disconnect, but it doesn't have to be that way. What most clients don't know, is that tax pros can and often do offer proactive measures in the form of advisory services. Here are the first steps to take when educating clients on the many services your firm offers.

INTRODUCE ADVISORY SERVICES

Start by aligning your services to your clients goals and needs by having a conversation with your clients about their future and the offerings your firm has to ensure a proactive-based mindset. As you lay out different plans, educate them on advisory services and the benefits of creating a specific plan designed for them and their finances. This initial meeting will help clients understand the partnership built through advisory services and the act of proactively planning for success, and having plans in place for unforeseeable events. Life can change quickly and having a year- round advisor can help adapt through those changes.

SET A MEETING CADENCE

Once clients are on board with adding advisory services to their contract, set up a meeting cadence to showcase your dedication to their success and to get a better understanding of what it is they want. By meeting with them regularly, tax pros are able to create curated content for each client and ensure a better future. This cadence will also allow you to have a pulse on each client's mindset at all times and be able to proactively predict changes to their goals.

CREATE A LONG-TERM PLAN

After conducting a few meetings with each client, start introducing longer-term planning. Once you have a better understanding of where they want to end, you can start creating a guide on where to begin and how to achieve certain goals. By doing so, tax pros are able to create gameplans to not only help clients succeed, but also to help combat unforeseen problems that arise, like a pandemic, and have a proactive plan in place to help decrease negative impacts.

STAY ON TOP OF TRENDS AND INVESTMENTS

Clients look to their tax pros for expert advice. To showcase your proactive mindset, start sharing your expertise about broader topics and investments in their business you believe are the best for your clients in the long run. This can be a simple article you share over email with commentary, or a bigger discussion in one of your regularly scheduled meetings. Showing your clients they are always top of mind goes a long way in ensuring their trust in you as their tax pro.

All in all, clients rely on tax pros to be proactive with their recommendations. By introducing advisory services, your clients will have confidence that you have their best interest in mind and have a plan in place to help them not only succeed, but navigate unforeseen troubles. ■

Jasen Stine is tax and accounting education leader at Intuit. Robbie Randall is a member of the Intuit ProConnect product specialist team.

intuit Accountants

Drive your business with Intuit Accountants The Path to Advisory guide.

Intuit's comprehensive guide will act as a roadmap to help you begin offering planning and advisory services to your clients. Inside is a collection of knowledge and best practices from the Intuit Tax Council members who have successfully mapped their route to advisory services. Their expertise will help pave the way for you to navigate the transition to advisory services with clarity and confidence.

Defining the destination

Well-defined mission, values, and purpose statements (MVP) serve as beacons to guide your practice and can have a powerful impact. As you move towards leading with advisory services, your mission will help identify target clients and communicate a high-level picture of the services you strive to provide.

Next stop is defining your firm's values. Values create the standard by which you hold employees accountable and filter decisions that guide the business. Your values statement should be short enough that you would know it by heart even when flustered under any circumstances. Onward.

Plan the roadmap

Mapping your advisory workflow is the key to recognizing gaps and opportunities for automation and client collaboration. Every firm will have different details in its process, but the ultimate goal is to standardize the process.

Tax expert Scott Sloan, CPA, says, *"…standardizing workflow is the key for us to be productive, so that we can serve our clients well."* Inside The Path to Advisory you can find effective tools to support almost every stage in your workflow.

Of course, each firm will have different processes within its workflow and slightly different workflows for each advisory offering, but the process segments are universal.

Next step is to determine your service model for billing your clients. The Path to Advisory has detailed breakouts to help you figure out which business model best suits your firm. Once this decision is made, it's time to develop and train your team to make sure everyone has the same set of goals, values, and best practices to apply in every situation.

Grow your practice

Now that you have your plan and team in place, it's time to offer advisory services. You just need to attract the right clients. Content marketing is a great way to engage your target audience and highlight your unique skills and offerings. You'll find that there are many ways to share meaningful content with your audience.

When you think about the types of content to share, it's best to work from the basis of your mission, values, and purpose. Using these as a measure for your content will ensure that your efforts create the desired results. Inside the guide, you'll find recommendations of the best tools to extend your firm's reach and map out a plan to grow your business.

Download The Path to Advisory today at https://bit.ly/PathToAdvisory

Intuit Accountants

Begin your journey to advisory with these first steps.

Whether you're just beginning to consider a transition into advisory services or have already begun the journey, Intuit Accountants The Path to Advisory guide will help you get to your ultimate destination—success.

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CLIENT EXPERIENCE FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

Ten Ideas for Your Playbook

A NEW YEAR means a fresh start. This year's columns on Client Experience have influenced my thinking about how important Client Experience is every day. Considering the impact of Client Experience, Team Member experience, and partner experience, including bottom-line profitability, has been a theme for me this year and many years in the past and into the future. We'll get to our predictions and recommendations for the coming year in a moment. Note that each recommendation has an experience component.

As you think about your firm's experience for tomorrow, how will you leverage your "own"ership in the process? Even without shares or investment, we each own responsibility for ourselves and our clients. We choose and can influence our own situation. I suspect that people who don't feel empowered by their current employment situation are more likely to make a change now than we have seen at any time in the past. I also suspect your clients may be more prone to change if they do not receive the service levels they want from you and your firm.

You have much to do since you work in public practice. But I want you to work smarter, not harder. The following technologies and strategies may help you clear your head and give you some ideas before diving into the busy season again.

KEY TECHNOLOGIES AND STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER

This year's conference season ended recently with the major publishers of Wolters Kluwer/CCH, Thomson Reuters, and Intuit holding events. Significant strategic announcements were thin. Scaling New Heights, Digital CPA, and AICPA Engage 2021 also started transitioning back to normal. Other trade shows such as the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) and accounting software conferences are likely to resume to full events this coming year. The sales pitches were heavy at every event I attended. Maybe your experience was different, or perhaps you didn't participate in any national events. Besides, aren't we better off choosing the best way for our clients and ourselves rather than being told about a product that doesn't live up to its reputation or sold a path to follow that isn't mainstream later?

Here's where I'd like to know your exact situation because I would customize my advice for the new year based on your precise needs rather than these general trends. However, you can use these recommendations as a scorecard for your firm. If you have already implemented one or more of these recommendations, then you are ahead of the curve. Hopefully, some of my recommendations make it to your list for consideration. So, what's in the lineup of technologies and strategies?

1 **Initial testing and rollout** of machine learning and artificial intelligence tools – While most of these products still need improvement, they are beginning to work. We need leverage for our labor and for everything we do in our firms. While automation won't replace professional labor anytime soon, tools like Vic.Ai will help. In the meantime, outsourcing labor to Xpitax or Taxfyle may be your best hope.

2 **Service offerings** that fit your firm and clients – your firm can be in Client Accounting Services (CAS), Advisory, Wealth Management, and a variety of other services, or not. That's your choice. But genuine advisory services provide tremendous client value, and firms providing CAS services frequently see the opportunities to assist clients first. We know that the Complete Advisory Solution can give the proper framework for an Advisory practice.

We want you to have the resiliency and stamina without burnout so that you can do what you love for many years into the future.

Speaking of Advisory services, remember that Corvee has an excellent capability to do Tax Advisory services accommodating the changing tax law proactively, as I pointed out in my June column Client Experience for Today – Personal Tax Advisory. Further, CAS stacks need review, updating, and continuously optimizing, as I pointed out in my July Client Experience for Today - Do You Have a Clear CAAS Vision? and

October Client Experience for Today – Leveraging Payroll columns. (View all of Randy Johnston's prior columns at www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/10267547/randy-johnston.)

Finally, tasks like payments should be considered with products like Corpay One, QuickFee, and Bill.com. I have provided Advisory and CAS guidance throughout the year in other columns, and you can rest assured that I'll keep watch on this critical area.

3

Better document management – this might be accomplished with an updated document management system (DMS) like Doc.It, SmartVault, or through implementing Microsoft Teams/SharePoint in a structured fashion. Watch for more guidance from this column in the future on the importance of implementing a new generation DMS. Again, DIY can be used, but document management and workflow need to be cloudified to support effective remote work and collaboration. A suitable DMS is the first step to enabling a good team experience.

4 Centralized Computing (Citrix Private Cloud or hosting from vendors like Cetrom) OR a complete Software as a Service (runs in a browser) implementation for remote access – the pandemic made remote access invaluable, and remote work is here to stay. If you are still tied to an office or a single computer because "that's where all the files are," this is the second step to enable team experience. More tools can be found on our Cloud Computing reference at CPA Firm Technology.

5 Improved Prepared by Client (PBC) document retrieval and delivery – this area is one of the first steps to better client experience. Tools like Liscio and Suralink lead the way for firms today, while others such as SafeSend, CCH Axcess Client Collaboration, and Onvio Firm Management are improving.

6 Better tracking and workflow – I'm amazed how many firms still use whiteboards, spreadsheets, or filing cabinets & shelves with projects on them to manage work. We considered the last decade the time to implement workflow. If you are using checklists, you may have an opportunity to optimize your firm even more with process review and workflow tools such as CCH XCM Axcess, FirmFlow, Avii, Reckon APS, or Doc.It. In addition, small firms might consider the workflow embedded in lower-end practice management tools below.

7 The right practice management for visibility – This may be the ideal time to consider upgrading and modernizing your practice management system. You can stay the course as a Suite buyer, where all your products come from Wolters Kluwer, Thomson Reuters, or Drake. Alternatively, you will likely find success with Clarity Practice Management, Canopy Practice Management, TPS Cloud Axis, Financial Cents, and Karbon, also available as Intuit's OEM ProConnect Practice Management.

8 Improved reporting – Even after you've upgraded your Practice Management system or your client's CAS systems, the reporting available is frequently not what you need. While there are hundreds of tools available, there is no silver bullet that solves all issues. However, each of these tools has a unique capability that we have covered in other columns. Consider Path by Simplex Financials, Reach Reporting, LivePlan, Fathom, Spotlight Reporting, Helix Reports, Jirav, and Zoho Analytics.

9 The right hardware – While the last few years have seen many chip shortages, desktop and laptop sales were up 300%, according to recent reports in *The Economist*. Vendors selling these products had their best year in some time. Our computer recommendations for this year include Windows 10, Microsoft 365, Intel Core i5-i9 or AMD Ryzen 5-9, dedicated graphics, 16-32GB of RAM, 128GB-1TB of NVM Express Solid-State drive (NVMe SSD), USB 3.1, and HDMI 2.1. Choosing the suitable processor for an accounting firm load (even if you are in the cloud) is essential. For you, the right CPU is probably an AMD Ryzen 9 5950x or an Intel i7 11370H, although these may be hard to find. Further, Fujitsu upgraded scanners notably this year with the ScanSnap ix1600, fi-800R, and fi-7300NX. Our favorite new monitor of the year is the ViewSonic TD1655 15.6" portable USB-C touch monitor or the non-touch version VG1655. Big monitors seem to be readily available, and you are probably safe with any of the Dell, HP, Lenovo, or LG large monitors. When Windows 11 is stable after tax season, you'll see the new capabilities of Windows 11 using large monitors. However, all the major publishers have warned to NOT upgrade to Windows 11 until after April 15.

10 The right frame of mind – I'm no psychologist, but I can see many of you are tired when I teach CPE. I can hear it in your voice when we talk on the phone. We are close to another tough tax season, and we must take care of ourselves and our team members. Evaluate what is working and what is not – critically. Are you usually in a reactive mode? What is the root cause? Where are you spending your time right now? What assets do you have that you can leverage? (Staff, systems, processes, etc.). Focus on incremental improvements that add to your enjoyment of your practice and make space for you to have a better life. Dream big - plan the next five years in your firm. Don't neglect your personal life as well - add time on your calendar to focus on what's most important in your life (family, friends, personal growth, fitness, etc.)

Take the time to be thoughtful about what you need to accomplish in the coming year and what needs to happen in your firm.

THAT SEEMS LIKE A TALL ORDER!

It is. But you have "own"ership in you! Take the time to be thoughtful about what you need to accomplish in the coming year and what needs to happen in your firm. We'll keep an eye on announcements that will affect your clients, your firm, and you from software and hardware publishers. We will also include specific guidance in our weekly podcast, **The Technology Lab** (www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/podcasts), which provides background on various products. I'm asking you to focus on your clients, your team, your firm, and you because that is where you have the most control.

Most CPAs I know are incredibly smart, hard-working, have high integrity, and genuinely care about their clients. While these attributes result in a lot of hard work, the rewards continue to be great. We want you to have the resiliency and stamina without burnout so that you can do what you love for many years into the future. The holiday season and the new year is a great time to reflect on that. So, what can you do for your clients, your team, your firm, and yourself that will positively impact today and tomorrow? ■

Let's Build a 2022 Q1 Marketing Plan for Your Firm

By Becky Livingston

WITH THE NEW year just around the corner, now is a great time to think about your 2022 Q1 marketing plan. If you specialize in tax, this has probably not been far from your mind. If you provide other services, tax time is a great time to promote them because people are already searching for CPAs and accounting firms.

Here are some things you should consider putting into place now before the year starts to get away from you.

PREPARE BUSY SEASON AD CAMPAIGNS

If your firm has an individual tax return service line, get ready to launch your campaign in January. Keep in mind, the cost of tax terms increases exponentially the closer you get to the return filing date. So run your campaign from mid-January through mid-March to keep those costs in check.

If you ran Google, Bing, or social media ads in 2021 Q1, review the costs and identify what worked and what didn't. Repurpose ad creative that worked well. Then, prepare to increase your budget by as much as 12 percent for Q1 2022, says AdAge.

REVIEW 2021 WEBSITE ANALYTICS

This data can help you formulate a plan for 2022. Here are a few things to check:

- Demographics: This will help you assess if those drawn to your website are your target market. If not, adjustments should be made to reach your target.
- Geography: This also supports your target market. Are the people visiting from the locations you're targeting?
- Acquisition Channel: How are people finding your site and which tools are driving the most traffic, e.g., email, social media, advertising, search engines, or referrals from other sources?
- Website Content: What are people most interested in? Ask them. You might be surprised by the data. It could help you create a new piece of content.
- Site Speed: Your website load speed impacts your search engine ranking. The slower the site, the less likely a search engine, such as Google or Bing, will put it on the first page.
- Search Terms: What terms were searched within the site also helps you craft content for the new year.

According to Website Builder Expert, even a one-second difference in loading time can have a huge impact on performance. Web pages that load within two seconds have an average bounce rate (enter and exit from the same page) of 9%, while pages that load in five seconds see their bounce rates skyrocket to 38%.

CREATE A 12-MONTH CONTENT CALENDAR

In an Excel file or similar product, each month identify at least one area your firm should focus on to help meet its business goals.

For example, January – Google Text Ad Campaign; February – Promote Webinar Playback Series; March – Share eBook Download. Each of those items is designed to generate leads. Include the topic, industry line, and/or service in your calendar so it looks something like this:

January	February	March
Google Ad Campaign	Promote Webinar Playback Series	Promote Internal Controls eBook
Focus:	Focus:	Focus:
Tax Returns – Individuals	2021 Tax Credits for Families	Construction Industry
Goal:	Goal:	Goal:
Gain 5-7 new clients	Subscribe 10 new people to series	Get 20 form completions / prospects

Complete the rest of the year based on your firm's goals. Once you finished this activity, you'll need to consider additional website content, such as landing pages (e.g., pages with forms), and the method in which you will promote the content, such as social media, print / online advertising, email, etc.

STOCKPILE CONTENT

If Q1 is your busy time, now's the time to stockpile content and schedule it for your social media profiles. Avoid the standard tax-related posts. Liven things up with accounting humor (Pinterest and Robert Half are great resources), sprinkle in some tips from your staff, and incorporate fill-in-the-blank questions into your social media schedule.

Filler content is also a good way to keep social media engagement going when you're busy. Try using jokes, like those from Ageras.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

Is your firm celebrating a milestone in 2022? If so, ensure emails signature are updated, web pages are created about the firm's history, anniversary emails are sent to clients, and celebrations are scattered throughout the year. Encourage media coverage by alerting local reporters to your events once the schedule has been set.

PREPARE FOR Q2

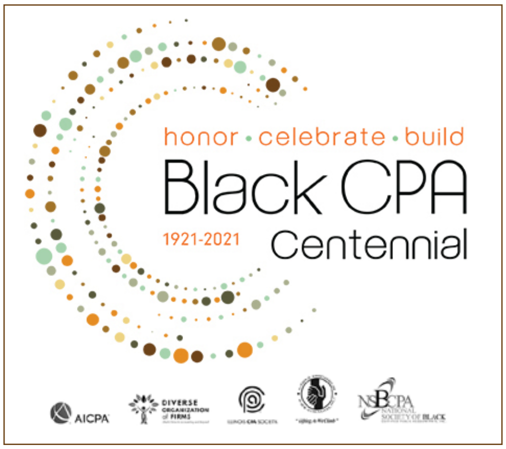
Before you know it the first quarter will be gone… hence the 12-month calendar. In Q1, you should be planning for Q2. If you don't have time, you should begin planning now.

- Get landing pages ready.
- Prep emails and newsletters for distribution.
- Request to speak at a spring or summer conference.
- Schedule team members to record one or two short video segments for sharing on social media.
- Reach out to business owners for a post-busy-season event, such as a document shredding party.

In short, below is your checklist. Get ready, the ride's about to get bumpy.

- Prepare busy season ad campaigns
- Review 2021 website analytics
- Create a 12-month content calendar
- Stockpile content
- Happy Anniversary
- Prepare for Q2

If you need help, reach out to an accounting marketing consultant who can help you to reach your goals. ■



Commemorating 100 Years of Black CPAs and Looking Forward

By Anita Dennis

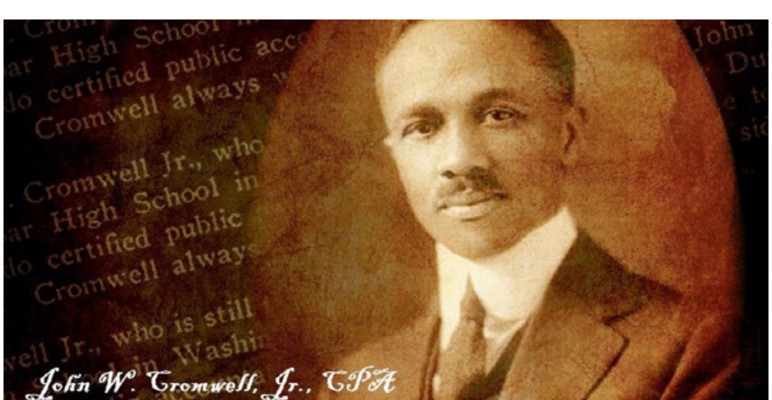
THROUGHOUT 2021, THE profession celebrated a landmark achievement that occurred in the face of adversity. In 1921, John W. Cromwell Jr. became the first black CPA, an accomplishment that opened doors for generations of aspiring black CPAs.

The successes of early black CPAs and those who came after them were the catalyst for this year's Black CPA Centennial project. The multifaceted yearlong effort was a collaboration of the AICPA, the Diverse Organization of Firms Inc., the Illinois CPA Society, the National Association of Black Accountants, and the National Society of Black CPAs.

HONORING THE PAST

The Black CPA Centennial highlighted the inspiring stories of black CPAs who broke through barriers and inspired others to do the same. Some of the pioneers who were featured include:

- **Cromwell**, whose family put an emphasis on education, attended a college preparatory program at Howard. He studied mathematics and astronomy at Dartmouth, earning a bachelor's and master's degree, graduating Phi Beta Kappa, and winning the Thayer Prize in mathematics there. Although he also taught himself accounting, he had to wait 15 years to become a CPA. The delay occurred because he was unable to obtain the experience needed for licensure since CPA firms refused to hire him and other black accountants during that time because they insisted that white clients wouldn't work with a black person. In 1921, he took the Uniform CPA Examination in New Hampshire, which did not have an experience requirement. During his career, he worked with clients in the Washington, D.C., area, taught mathematics, and spent three years as the comptroller of Howard University.
- **Mary T. Washington Wylie** became the nation's first black woman CPA and the 13th black person to become a CPA in 1943, a full 22 years after Cromwell earned his credential. After opening a practice in her basement in Chicago, she worked tirelessly to find and employ aspiring black CPAs so that they would have the experience they needed to join the profession. Her firm's clients were generally small black-owned businesses and not-for-profits, as well as large black-owned companies. The firm would ultimately grow to become one of the largest black-owned firms in the country at one point.
- Having black professors teaching accounting classes can influence whether black students choose to study accounting. Two pioneers opened the door to academia for generations who came after



them: **William Louis Campfield**, who became the first black CPA Ph.D. in 1951, and **Larzette Hale**, who became the first woman black CPA Ph.D. in 1955. Among other achievements, Campfield would ultimately be the first black accountant to be inducted (posthumously) into the American Accounting Association's Hall of Fame, while Hale would head Utah State University's school of accountancy and was the first black person appointed a regent of the Utah Board of Higher Education.

- Fifty years after black people first entered the profession, **Elmer J. Whiting Jr.** broke another barrier in 1971 by becoming the first black partner of what were known at the time as the Big 8 firms. Armed with an MBA from Case Western University and a law degree from Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, he had struggled to get the experience he needed after college. Finally, he successfully petitioned to have bookkeeping work counted as valid experience for CPA licensure and became the first black CPA in Ohio in 1950. He opened his own successful firm in Cleveland and became a Big 8 partner when his practice was purchased by Ernst & Ernst.

Those are just a few of the leaders and role models recognized during the black CPA Centennial. In addition, many others — such as organizations whose everyday missions support and promote the advancement of black CPAs, as well as numerous state CPA societies — have robust initiatives to improve the profession's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

CELEBRATING THE PROGRESS

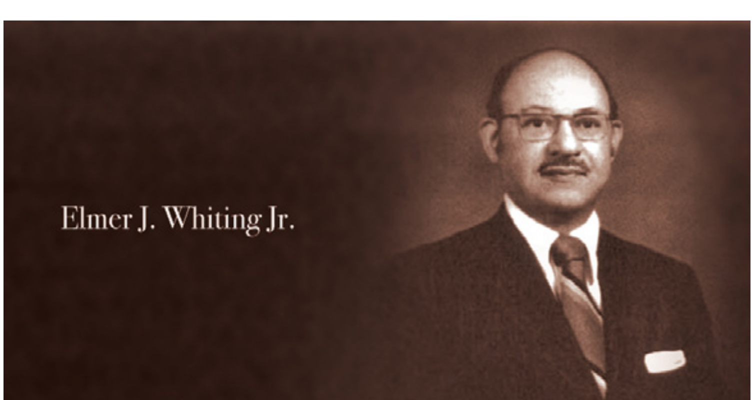
The yearlong anniversary campaign culminated with a special virtual celebration event in November to honor the past, celebrate the achievements, and build on the future of the black CPA community. It also highlighted the outstanding black CPAs chosen for the inaugural 40 Under 40 Black CPA Award.

The event featured inspiring stories of some of the first black CPAs and highlighted unique programs that support aspiring black CPAs.

Proceeds from the virtual celebration and donations from individuals and organizations are being directed to the black CPA Centennial Fund, which was established earlier this year to support national scholarships and other programs to assist black individuals interested in pursuing the CPA credential. The campaign's organizing partners plan to disperse during 2022 the funds collected with the goal to support programs that provide black accounting students and young professionals with access to training and job opportunities, mentors, and financial assistance for expenses related to becoming a CPA.

BUILDING THE FUTURE

The first 100 years of black CPAs tell a story of determination and inspiration. However, despite the tenacious work of these individuals and organizations, the percentage of black CPAs in the profession is still far too low. Significant progress is needed.



In addition to honoring trailblazing black CPAs, the articles in this series have also focused on advice for firms and other employers that want to recruit, retain, and advance more black CPAs. Some of the recommendations are to:

- Introduce black students to the opportunities available in the profession. Given the small percentage of black CPAs, it is less likely that black students will grow up knowing CPAs and learning about what they do. CPAs can begin by doing presentations that introduce the profession to elementary and high schools with minority populations.
- Improve the number of black CPAs teaching accounting. Students are more likely to be drawn to classrooms and careers if related courses are taught by people who look like them.
- Expand the recruiting horizon. Consider stepping up recruiting efforts at Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
- Focus on advancing more role models. black students and young professionals may choose other careers if they cannot envision themselves being successful in the profession. They may also feel more included at a firm that clearly welcomes and supports black professionals.
- Understand the financial and other hurdles that black students may experience. For example, some may need to juggle one or more jobs to finance school and the cost of preparing for the Uniform CPA Examination. In hiring and attempting to retain black professionals, employers should be aware of the impact that their financial situation may have on their academic background and ability to become certified.
- Make sure that black professionals have the same opportunities to grow. Be intentional about assigning them sponsors, mentors, and stretch assignments.

For any of these steps to succeed, employers must make diversity, equity, and inclusion a strategic priority. DEI must have strong support from firm leadership and be recognized as a critical strategic initiative that will broaden the firm's perspective, offer recruiting and retention advantages, and appeal to clients seeking to work with an organization that mirrors society. Building on the excitement of the Black CPA Centennial celebration and the inspiration of the people and organizations featured this past year, firm leaders can make real change.

The Black CPA Centennial was a yearlong effort to honor, celebrate, and build upon the progress black CPAs have made in shaping the accounting profession. The celebration was a collaborative effort of the AICPA, Diverse Organization of Firms, Illinois CPA Society, National Association of Black Accountants, and National Society of Black CPAs. ■

Anita Dennis is a freelance writer based in New Jersey.

Why Your Firm Needs **Gated Content**

By Katie Thomas, CPA

IF YOU'RE NEW to the world of content marketing, you may have heard the term "gated content" and wondered what it is and how it can help your firm. There are many advantages to gating your content, but it's important to understand when and how to use it. First, let's take a closer look at what gated content is.

WHAT IS GATED CONTENT?

Gated content is targeted content that's only accessible when visitors take certain actions, such as opting in to a website's email list.

Most people are familiar with gated content even if they don't realize it. For example, let's say that you land on a website and you're greeted by a pop-up asking you to give your email address to receive a free eBook. The eBook is considered gated content because you have to provide your email address to obtain it.

In other words, there's a barrier - a gate - to obtaining the content.

GATED VS UNGATED CONTENT

- Gated content can only be viewed or obtained by giving an email address or taking another action.
- Ungated content is content that visitors can freely access without taking additional steps. Regular blog posts are a great example of ungated content.

HOW GATED CONTENT FITS INTO YOUR FIRM'S CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY

Why would you want to gate your content? How does this content fit into your overall content marketing strategy?

One of the primary purposes of gated content is to build and segment an email list. It can help you generate leads, increase sales and even provide more insight into your customers.

Gated content serves a very specific purpose, and that purpose is to generate leads that can be nurtured and hopefully converted into customers. Gated content has been found to have high conversion rates, as high as 45%.

Ungated content is what your firm will use to drive traffic to your website, increase page views and build credibility and trust with your audience.

WHEN TO USE GATED CONTENT

A well-rounded content marketing strategy includes a mix of both gated and ungated content. But how do you determine which content to gate? When is the right time to gate your content?

To determine whether to gate your content, consider the following:

- **Your goals for the content**. Do you want to generate leads or educate prospects? Gated content is ideal for generating leads, while ungated content will help inform visitors and prospects about your services.
- **The value of the content.** Even if it's purpose is to generate leads, it still needs to be valuable enough for people to consent to signing up for your email list.
- **Is this information freely available elsewhere?** If your competitors are offering this information for free (ungated), then consider whether you're putting yourself at a disadvantage by gating it.

USING GATED CONTENT AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE BUYING JOURNEY

Gating your content too early or at the wrong stage in the buying journey can frustrate or turn-off prospects. Timing is just as important as the content itself.

Generally, gated content is most effective at the following stages:

- **Awareness:** The prospect is aware of the problem, but they are in the process of researching solutions and learning more about your services. At this stage, gated eBooks, podcasts, and white papers are ideal. They educate the prospect on the problem and how your firm may help.
- **Consideration:** Prospects now view your firm as a credible authority and are considering using your services. Gated webinars or case studies may help convince the prospect that your firm is the right choice for their needs.
- **Decision:** Prospects are now deciding whether to take the dive and use your firm's services. At this stage, you may offer a free consultation or something similar.

It is crucial to ensure that your content aligns with the prospect's stage in the buyer's journey. If they're in the decision stage, they're probably not interested in an eBook explaining their problem and potential solutions. They're looking for a consultation or at least a webinar showing how your firm will solve their problem.

4 TYPES OF GATED CONTENT

Understanding the different types of gated content can help you determine which ones to offer at each stage of the buyer's journey.

Some of the most common and effective types of gated content include:

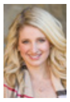
- **eBooks:** eBooks are one of the most common types of gated content, and they can provide tremendous value to your prospects, especially if you can make them interactive. These can pair well with blog posts to encourage visitors to opt-in.
- **White Papers:** Like eBooks, white papers aim to inform the prospect. However, in this case, the information comes in the form of an in-depth report. These are long-form, valuable pieces of content that can help position your firm as an authority.
- **Templates:** Templates are an excellent choice for gated content because they're actionable, tangible and highly valuable. They're ideal for prospects in the consideration or decision stage because these folks are already committed to solving their problem.
- **Webinars:** Much like eBooks and white papers, webinars inform and educate prospects while helping them get to know you and building authority. Gated webinars are ideal for buyers in the awareness stage, and the high value they offer will sway many visitors to fill out your opt-in form.

Virtually any type of content can be gated, but these are the four most common types. Generally, these types of content are more successful at generating leads at different stages of the buying journey.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Gated content can help your firm generate more leads and increase your client base. But it's essential to use the correct type of content at the right stage in the buyer's journey. Finally, make sure that your content marketing strategy also includes ungated content to help build brand awareness, trust, and credibility with your audience. ■

Katie Thomas, CPA, is the owner of Leaders Online, where they help professionals in the accounting industry increase their impact, influence, and income through thought leadership marketing.



Dancing in the Dark:

2022 Will See Shifting Tax Regulations in the U.S. and Abroad

By George L. Salis

IMPENDING LEGISLATION WILL likely determine the fate of tax regulations globally—or not. A lot remains to be seen, including the final contents of President Joe Biden's infrastructure package and details on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) 15% global minimum tax proposal.

While there is incredible uncertainty as we finish 2021, there are a couple major events tax teams should be tracking, as their outcomes could make a big difference for the 2022 tax landscape and well beyond.

INFRASTRUCTURE BILL KEEPS DOMESTIC TAX SCHEMES IN LIMBO

Businesses will need to keep up with a dancing landscape of regulations across the United States, many of which will hinge on what kind of state and local funding President Biden's infrastructure bill flows down to those governments. The uncertain economic outlook will depend on many interdependent factors and potentially result in a volatile regulatory landscape fraught with risks for businesses.

For example, federal lawmakers from high-cost states have been pushing for the infrastructure package to include a repeal of the $10,000 cap on the state and local tax (SALT) deduction. However, that would cost Congress an estimated $80 billion a year, which makes it a difficult sell for legislators.

Should the SALT deduction be kept in place, states like New York and California could look for other ways to fill state and local budget gaps. In fact, we've already seen state and local governments (SLGs) finding creative ways to expand their tax bases in 2021 and most are targeting sales and transaction taxes.

Those taxes already make up 33% percent of SLG budgets in jurisdictions that charge sales and use tax. It is also far easier to administer, remit and audit sales tax due to fewer exemptions and more frequent collections, so it's clear why governments are taking this tack. To date, this controversy continues in the light of new congressional initiatives and legislation.

AMBIGUITY AND UNCERTAINTY REMAIN AROUND DIGITAL SERVICES TAXES IN THE EU, UK, AND OTHER COUNTRIES WITH "UNILATERAL" DST REGIMES

The OECD's proposal for a global minimum tax was meant, in part, to quell an uprising of unilateral digital services taxes in EU countries, and elsewhere. In fact, after 136 countries participating in the OECD's Inclusive Framework agreed to a minimum tax rate of 15% for the top 100 big tech companies and to curve tax avoidance through tax havens, on October 19, U.S. officials announced they were close to reaching an agreement with the U.K., France, Italy, Spain and Austria to suspend their DSTs when the global minimum tax comes into force. Later in October, in a joint statement, the U.K., France, Italy, Austria, and Spain, announced that they would repeal their national 'Digital Services Taxes' (DSTs).

However, a treaty or international convention will be necessary to implement new global tax rules, which will impact tax regulations in ways we yet cannot fully predict. But, when exactly that will happen is unclear, at best, since the global agreement still must be approved by national legislative bodies in the countries that signed on.

While this could be a real breakthrough for big U.S. tech companies who have fought these country-specific DSTs as they've popped up over the last two years, it just means more risk and uncertainty for how and when businesses should be collecting and remitting taxes on digital services in EU countries, the U.K. and many other countries, as some recalcitrant countries did not join the agreement, and others have yet to decide.

Since the deal would mean that countries would need to drop their DSTs once the global minimum tax is codified in the next couple years, countries

with DSTs could choose any time to drop those taxes. In fact, less than a week before the DST deal was announced, Italy said it would likely keep its DSTs in place until at least 2024.

This is a very "complex" time for the international tax landscape. Moving parts that we could have never imagined even a couple years ago have changed—and are still changing—the way states, countries and continents devise and implement new and expanded tax schemes. The ripples and implications are surely to be felt in matured and developing nations, and of course, across both direct and indirect tax regimes, as in the end, all commerce is based on transactions.

There's still much to be determined, so it would be foolhardy to make big predictions. But one thing is clear. Businesses and their tax teams need to watch these developments closely or risk non-compliance. ■

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Preparing for an OSHA Inspection

PRESIDENT BIDEN PROMISED to aggressively enforce all workplace laws during his campaign for the presidency. Biden's direction to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to double its number of inspectors and increase workplace inspections is a significant indication of the administration's commitment to this promise.

There has been little sign of widespread OSHA activity thus far, likely because the new OSHA head, Doug Parker, was only confirmed in November. Another reason for the current lack of increased enforcement is that the DOL/OSHA staff has been limited due to COVID restrictions. Most staff are not scheduled to return in person until January 2022. However, with the controversy surrounding the COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) requiring employers with 100 or more employees to mandate vaccination among their employees, workplaces are likely to soon face increased scrutiny from OSHA.

Whether an OSHA inspection of your workplace is triggered by an injury, a complaint, a programmed wall-to-wall inspection, or the new COVID-19 ETS, being prepared will limit potential liability and potential citations. Reviewing and updating required, written safety plan(s) for your facility, including COVID-19 measures, is a very basic first step. Developing a protocol for responding to a potential OSHA inspection is an important next step. Typically, OSHA will contact an employer and attempt to schedule an on-site inspection (but unannounced inspections are not unheard of).

After OSHA notifies an employer to schedule an inspection, the employer should undertake a preparatory, internal inspection and confirm that any identified or outstanding problems are corrected as soon as possible. An employer must also confirm that the OSHA 300 logs are current, and any Safety Committee minutes are prepared for review as well. If the inspection is in response to a workplace accident, the incident report and related materials (equipment manuals, schematics, lockout/tagout protocols, etc.) should be ready to go.

WARRANT OR WARRANTLESS INSPECTION

The Supreme Court has held that an employer can force OSHA to obtain a warrant before entering its premises for an inspection. Whether to insist upon a warrant is a significant decision with serious pros and cons. Among the "pros" is potentially limiting the scope of the inspection and even potential dismissal of citations unrelated to the court-issued warrant. A frequently cited "con" is aggravating the inspector, who will make sure to maximize the number of violations. While such conduct is contrary to OSHA's inspection procedures, human nature may prevail. Absent unique circumstances, employers generally seek to cooperate in completing the inspection and rarely insist upon a warrant. You and the oompliance officer share the same goal — a safe workplace for your employees.

CONTROLLING THE WALKAROUND

After reviewing your OSHA 300 logs, the compliance officer normally tours the facility. An employer-representative is generally requested to participate. If your operation is unionized, a union representative may also participate. Compliance officers can ask questions of employees and supervisors/managers during inspection. The employer-representative should carefully note all comments and questions during the walk around. If the compliance officer takes any photographs and/or videos, the employer-representative should take the same photographs and/or video. He/she should also exercise as much control as possible regarding the scope of the inspection without creating confrontation.

If the compliance officer notes an alleged violation, it should be corrected, if possible, while the inspection continues. The employer-representative should not acknowledge a potential violation, but rather, just correct it. Unless it is a scheduled wall-to-wall inspection, the inspection should focus on the equipment or area where the incident occurred that prompted the visit. Permitting the compliance officer unrestricted access merely increases the potential for finding violations and should be prevented.

CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Compliance officers have the right to, and generally will, interview both employees and management. These interviews are normally done on the employer's premises. Employers have a right to be present and have their attorney present at any supervisor or management interview, but no right to be present during employee interviews. Employees are not obligated to participate in interviews and the employer can so inform them. Employers can also inform employees they can refuse to sign any statement prepared by the compliance officer. While OSHA could seek a subpoena to compel employee participation, they generally do not take that step in cases not involving serious injury, death, or egregious safety violations.

Managers and supervisors should be truthful, but not volunteer unrequested information. They should respond to questions as succinctly as possible and request a copy of any statement they are asked to sign. Employers should also advise employees interviewed to request a copy of any statement they provide.

EFFECTIVE CLOSING CONFERENCE

A Closing Conference typically concludes the inspection process. The compliance officer normally will reference any standards that he/she feels the employer violated, as well as possible abatement measures that could be taken. The employer-representative should take the opportunity to obtain as much information as possible, including all possible violations that may result from the inspection, as well as the specific OSHA standards or CDC guidance on COVID safety protocols involved. If there are any unique problems with abatement, those should also be thoroughly discussed, including any efforts already taken to abate the condition and eliminate employee exposure to a hazard.

OSHA inspections do not have to be the distressing experience envisioned by most employers. Proper planning and preparation, as well as reasonable efforts to control the scope of the inspection as it is occurring, will greatly increase the employer's opportunity to limit or even avoid costly OSHA citations. ■

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Avoiding the Inevitable

A COMMON IDIOM we all have heard countless times, "Nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." Benjamin Franklin purportedly wrote that famous line in a letter back in 1789 after the Constitution was signed. Since then that phrase has become a legend on its own. From countless references in literature, movies, books, pop-culture, to you name it, that phase has shown up. We accountants of any generation are fully aware of this phrase and see this first hand every year. As for us, it isn't just taxes that are certain but it is another busy season.

Unfortunately, the 2022 busy season is shaping up to be more challenging than normal. Firms of all sizes are faced with one major problem more than anything else, even death: A shortage of people. It doesn't matter the firm size, scope of work, public vs. private, the talent shortage is here.

Even those virtual firms, often run by millennials, are facing this same challenge. In the past, these virtual firms did not face the same staffing shortage legacy firms faced, however now they cannot avoid the staffing shortage any more than people can avoid death and taxes.

Given this universal problem with which we are faced and last month's column talking about the importance of taking time to plan for the future, I think some planning for this problem is appropriate.

Before you wait to address this issue on March 1, when it is too late, we can start now and put a plan in place today. The reality we are faced with is firms will have some level of a staffing shortage. That is not an unknown. The unknown is what you will do as a result.

PLAN A

The first area a firm should look at is pricing. We are not talking here about why you should stop billing by the hour, of course you should. What we are talking about are the options you provide your clients. You see in the current conditions, our supply of staff to create the tax return products is limited. Therefore, we can expect that we will complete fewer returns next year than in prior years. What this provides us with is an opportunity to offer our clients options.

To frame out that option we can look at two other industries, Disney theme parks and airlines. Both of those provide their customers with options where customers can pay more money and get more options or benefits. At Disney, customers can pay more when entering the park to avoid long lines and get preferred access. At airlines, customers can pay more money to get a better seat on the plane. After all, consumers love options.

Accountants can follow this same process. We can offer our clients a premium tax service. For a small additional price, the client's return will get priority assignment and return completion within the firm. Many firms have already done this in the past with great success. In this situation you are letting your clients decide. They can move to the front of the line and get their returns done sooner for a price. Or they can wait in the longer lines like everyone else. By doing this, you are allowing your clients to make the choice on which returns you do first, and you get compensated as a result.

PLAN B

Now, if adjusting your prices does not appeal to you, I have a another option for you. This is one that actually has gained in popularity over the past few years as firms are constantly trying to figure out how to do more with less. As industry thought leader Paul Latham of Hayden Rock Solutions discusses firms are beginning to sell a tier of their clients to another firm to free up resources and capacity for growth.

You may not be ready to sell your whole practice and retire, but perhaps it is time to think about selling a part of your practice to another firm. This transaction allows you to capitalize on the value you have built in your practice today, and by selling a part of your practice you free up a substantial amount of resources as well.

Normally when firms take this path, they will sell the bottom third of their practice to someone else. The firm ends up selling a third of the revenue, where those clients make up closer to 50% of the work/hours done at the firm. The resulting gain in resources is then highly significant.

DO NOT WAIT

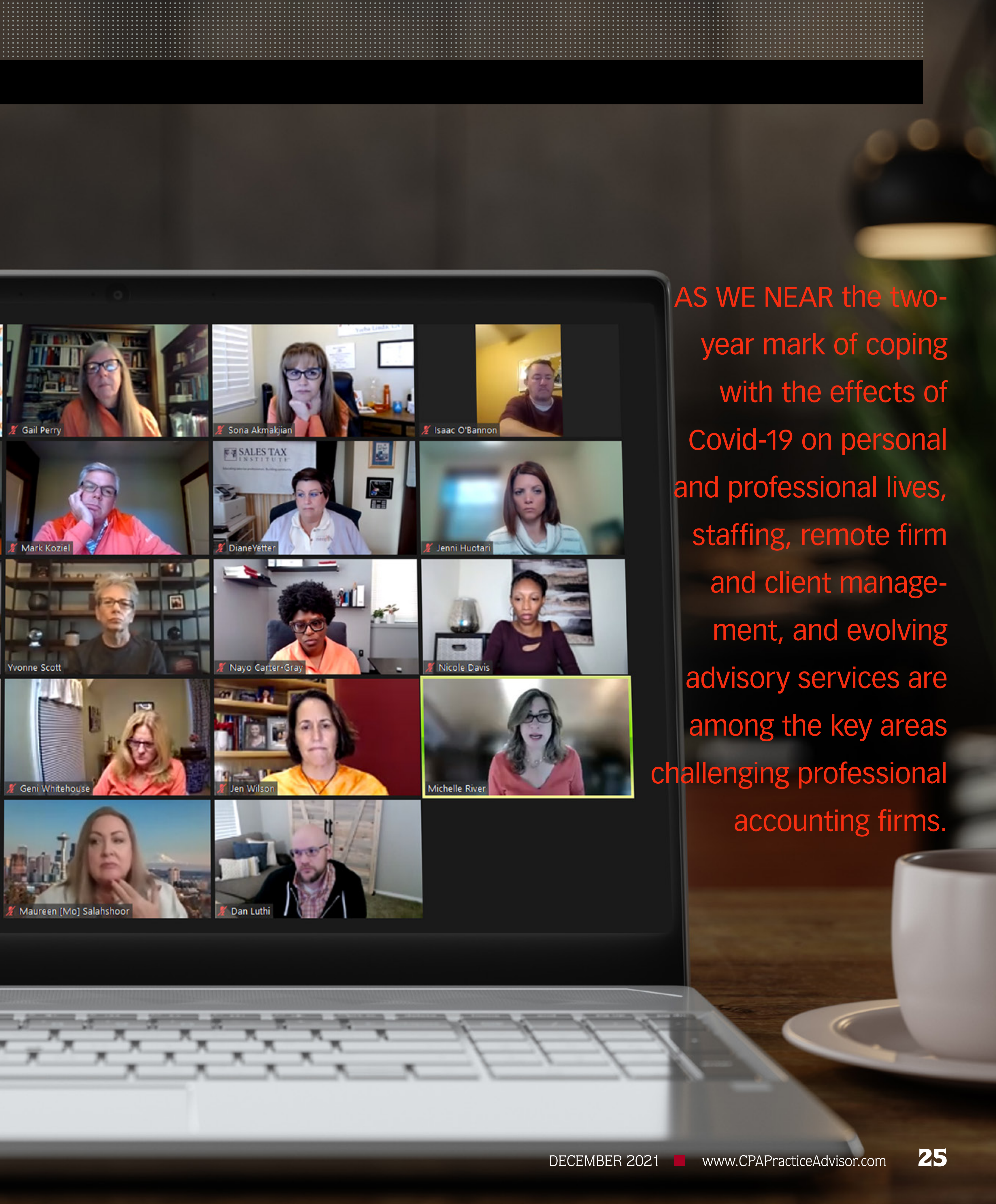
Before March comes and we feel overwhelmed, an hour of effort now can save 100 hours when it really counts. While you may not be able to find more people to hire, you have options to navigate this path forward and have a successful busy season. While taxes may be certain, your pain does not have to be. ■

FEATURE

Accounting Meta Influencers Discuss Trends, Provide Actionable Insights

Staffing, Technology and Pricing Posing Greatest Challenges to Profession

By Isaac M. O'Bannon, Managing Editor



AS WE NEAR the two-year mark of coping with the effects of Covid-19 on personal and professional lives, staffing, remote firm and client management, and evolving advisory services are among the key areas challenging professional accounting firms.

Nearly two dozen accounting thought leaders, organized by compliance automation provider Avalara as the Accounting Meta Influencers, gathered on November 1st for an online video roundtable to discuss current trends facing the accounting profession. The practitioners and influencers are challenged to develop actionable strategies for firms to address pressing issues, and will convene quarterly. **Gail Perry**, a CPA, editor-in-chief of *CPA Practice Advisor*, and member of the Accounting Meta Influencers, moderated the discussion.

STAFFING

Firm staffing challenges arose as one of the most pressing issues being faced by firms. Perry noted a recent survey by PwC that showed 25 percent of employees nationwide changed jobs during 2021, either through retirement, leaving the workforce, starting a new job or career, returning to school, or for parental or other reasons. Additionally, the survey found that 65 percent of workers were considering looking for a new job, and most wanted one with at least three days per week being remote. Nearly 20 percent wanted a new job that was fully remote.

This restless workforce is affecting firms directly as well as their clients, as businesses of all sizes are also facing the challenges of labor shortages.

"Clients are struggling," said **Yvonne Scott**, founder, CIO Concierge. "We now have a national labor market, even for firms and businesses that are not national companies. Unfortunately, many are still trying to source staff locally, and want people to move closer. Professionals are increasingly unwilling to do that, and so it's necessary to change how we consider compensation and salary structures."

"That's the beauty of remote work," said **Jen Wilson**, CEO and founder of ConvergenceCoaching, LLC, which provides firm management consulting. "Borderless reach for clients and staff allows firms to reimagine ideal clients and fee structures. That includes client pricing, and as much as 20 percent price increases and letting go of clients you can't serve profitably."

According to Wilson, the dynamics of the market are increasing the need for accounting and advisory services, at the same time firms are facing staffing challenges. The result is a seller's market for firms, which are now able to adjust their fees upward or focus on more profitable clients. Likewise, however, staff compensation and benefits must be adjusted upward, as well. Wilson noted that many larger firms on the coasts are poaching remote staff to work remotely but at coastal salaries.

"Raises have to be 10% or better, but that still doesn't keep pace with coastal companies," Wilson said. "Four or 6 percent won't cut it. Additionally, stay bonuses are critical, so firms need to conduct re-recruiting interviews with questions like, what do you like, and how can I help you?"

She also noted she doesn't care when her staff does their work. "Many of these people are night owls. Where and when they do the work, who cares, as long as clients feel served." Wilson said a key part of maintaining work-life balance during the holidays is that her offices close for about three weeks, which is fully-paid leave for all staff.

PRICING CONCERNS

To cover the increased staffing costs, many firms are increasing pricing, focusing on more profitable services, or referring less-profitable clients out. Any changes in pricing must be communicated to clients, of course.

"A small firm we advise sent letters to clients about pending pricing changes, and explaining that they may end up having to pay even more if they left and went to another accounting firm," said **Michelle River**, president of Fore LLC, which provides growth and pricing consulting to firms. She noted that most of that firm's clients accepted the price increases and those who were most reluctant were generally less profitable clients anyway.

Not all firms have the same ability to raise fees to cover increased staffing costs, said **Shayna Chapman**, a CPA and owner of Ohio-based Shaynaco LLC. "Non-coastal firms are not able to poach coastal staff," she said. "Firm revenue and compensation can't be as competitive for many reasons, including smaller clients with lower revenues, and even lower income tax clients."

For firms that can't match the coastal salaries, work-life balance and other benefits can be a critical factor in recruiting. However, as **Dan Luthi** pointed out, "Overinflating prices and pay will lead to an imbalance of pricing and negotiation." Luthi is a partner at Ignite Spot Accounting Service and an author at the "Firm of the Future" blog.

"It's critical to make sure current staff are happy – when and how to change compensation – to make sure they don't leave," said **Nicole Davis**. At her Atlanta firm Butler-Davis Tax & Accounting, she says "we've made Fridays optional [4-day workweeks], increased PTO, and moved to 20-day PTO accruals in addition to holidays and other PTO days."

Donny Shimamoto agreed. "Our firm has longer tenure, but we manage to pay below market because of our greater work-life benefits," he said. "We give our staff lots of trust and leeway and teach them how to draw boundaries. With increased workloads, staff need to learn how to turn off." Shimamoto is the founder and managing director of Intraprise Techknowlogies.

Randy Johnston, founder of Network Management Group, Inc. and executive vice president of K2 Enterprises, noted that professionals are feeling pressure from many directions: Clients, staffing, technology, advisory pricing, and that these pressures seem to have accelerated in last decade.

"In my client base, for managing partners and businesses, turnover rates are substantial. Some as low as 4 percent, but the highest is 54 percent," Johnston said. "One firm never had more than 4.5 percent turnover in 30 years, but in 2021 they had more than 20 percent. With many professionals now working from home, there are many more options, and firms are taking more care, better addressing compensation and workload, and paying more attention to people details."

In his consulting firm, Johnston says they typically pay more, restrict hours, and give the best benefits they can, including perks medical like orthodontia. "If the business owner is making money, I want to share it."

Like most firms, **Gabrielle Luoma**, CPA, says her outsourced accountancy and advisory, Tucson-based MOD Ventures, has increased the use of virtual meetings for clients and one-on-one conversations with staff. "Are staff taking PTO? Let them go, encourage them to use it. We try to ensure the firm supports the team we have and make sure they stay happy," she said.

The firm also invests time in cross training, Luoma said, so other staff are up-to-speed on each others' clients. "This way, when it comes to vacation, they can really unplug and not have to check in. When you have great staff they want to check in while on vacation, but you don't want that. You need to build an environment that is collaborative and supports other staff."

According to **Rick Telberg**, CEO of CPA Trendlines Research, the high turnover rates and staffing challenges may not be a negative. "Forty percent of firms are not taking on new work, but 60 percent say they are in expansion mode – even if they can't find the people. But firms with the highest potential turnover are the best firms, innovating, ahead on technology, hitting their numbers. The people in play are at the best firms, and yes, the best people are in play. It's some of the not best who are sticking around. Maybe firms should force a little turnover with clients and staff."

EDUCATION

Directly related to staffing was the career-readiness of recent university graduates joining the workforce. Many on the panel noted that newly-graduated accountants have theory-based education but little practical skillsets.

"It's important to remember the difference between training and education," noted Johnston. "Education is long-haul, training is short-term. Training is reactionary, education is proactive. People are trying to do everything in reactionary mode, and while automation will help, it won't solve the issues firms are facing."

"What I've found in teaching at San Jose State are several disconnects," said **Annette Nellen**, CPA, a professor and director of the MST program at San Jose State University. "Half of our students are working professionals, and their whole life is connected to tech these days. But the employment model still has 19th century elements. Students feel overworked. It may be time for a new social contract in the accounting field."

Shimamoto, who was involved in the AICPA's CPA Evolution Initiative, suggested changes need to be made in the curriculum, but equally so, firms need to let staff work when and how they are most productive.

Luthi agreed, saying the development of education is moving in that direction. "In three to five years from now the market will be challenged. Firms can't own every aspect of new worker life."

Luoma noted her firm is "reskilling everyone that comes in, because our firm has specific ways of doing things. We are not a traditional firm and are constantly evaluating how to do things better. Which is why we connect with local colleges – to teach them what we're looking for. Modern accounting is not just plugging numbers into boxes – there is creativity needed."

MOVING FORWARD

How are firms working toward solving these near and long-term challenges? In addition to more generous compensation, more attentive staff management, and proactive client management, many of the participants had specific advice.

Gail Perry asked the group, "What things are new because of COVID-19 and how can firms take advantage of these trends? Staffing, models, type of staff? How can firms change how we deal with remote employees and clients?"

Nayo Carter-Gray, an EA and founder of 1st Step Accounting, noted that it may be necessary to retrain clients. "We need to tell clients that there are few financial emergencies. Rarely do they need an instant response. Firms should try to operate like Apple or other large, successful companies," she said. "You don't tell them how you want to do business with them, they tell you. Firms need to tell their clients the same thing. Set boundaries and rules of engagement."

Diane Yetter agreed. "Clients need to better adapt to remote processes," she said. COVID-19 has made some adapt better, but old school industries were not as able." Yetter is the president and founder of YETTER Tax, a sales tax consulting and tax technology firm.

But overall, firms need to be completely on board with either fully remote staff or at least a hybrid model that enables staff to choose.

While many workers are attracted to remote work, **Nicole Davis**, CEO of Butler-David Tax & Accounting, says some of her best staff would prefer an office setting. "Some staff say they can't work from home. Some people aren't amenable to it," because of workspace issues, distractions or other factors like lower accessibility to business class internet at home.

Carter-Gray agreed. "Some people don't like work from home – they need to separate the two with a different environment." She says that some firms are providing remote workers with a stipend to use for occasional office space rental, such as WeWork spaces to supplement their ability to get the job done." ■

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COVID-19 Taught Us the Importance of Slowing Down

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IF COVID HAS taught us anything, it's that maybe we don't need to be as busy as before. Pre-pandemic, there were always too many things to do, too many clients to see, and never enough time in the day. Finding work-life harmony seemed to be a constant struggle.

Once lockdown happened, time slowed down, and routines changed. Suddenly large chunks of the day were no longer taken up by commuting or nonessential meetings. With the shutdown came a sense of flexibility that was not there before.

As time passes, many people find they enjoy the slower pace and don't want it to change. Whether you are still remote or back in the office, professional working life as we know it has been permanently altered; embrace this change and slow down.

The newfound slow pace may not always be easy to maintain, but continuing to do so will lead to a greater appreciation for life and a greater level of happiness.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SLOW DOWN

To slow down means to change your pace. The first area in your life that may need a change is your schedule. Does your current schedule meet your needs, or is it leaving you frazzled and frustrated? Are you making time to enjoy the little things, like savoring your cup of coffee in the morning or disconnecting from your devices for a couple of hours? Or do you have back-to-back meetings for the next week?

Slowing down can also mean slowing down your work process and practicing "single-tasking"—focusing on one task rather than switching between unrelated tasks. Instead of talking to a client on the phone while reading a finance report, take the time to complete one task before beginning another.

There are many ways to slow down; you just have to find the right methods for you. Here are three simple and effective ways to maintain your newly established slow pace.

SCHEDULE 'DO-NOTHING' TIME

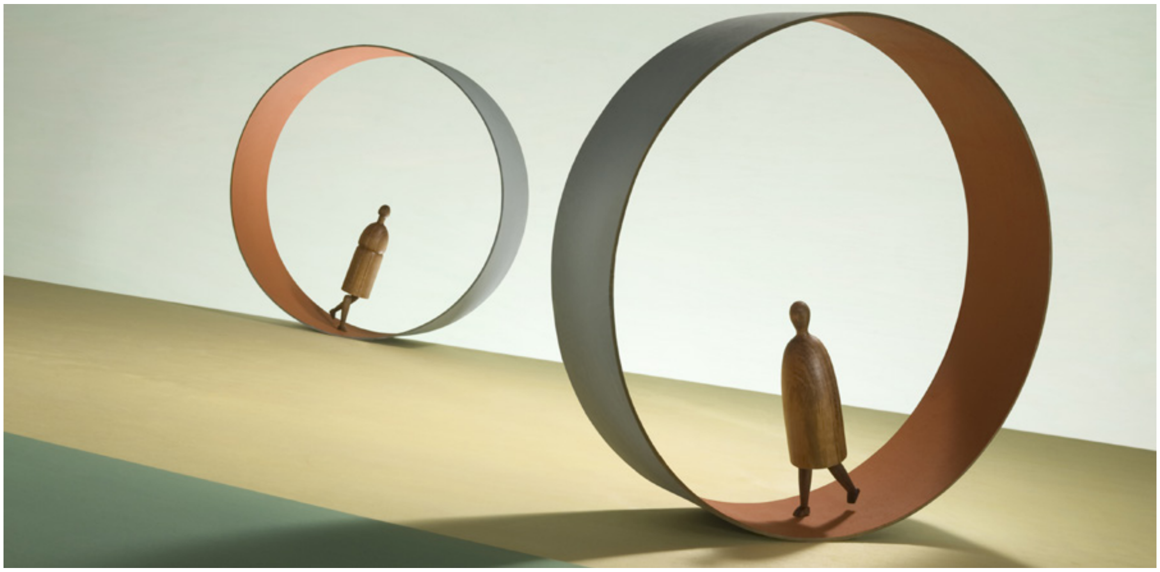
Having flexibility in your schedule allows you to shape your life in a way that works for you. Instead of having meetings every day, you can block out a day or an afternoon for deep work with no interruptions. Or, you can schedule a time to do nothing.

As busy accountants, we need to take the time to do nothing. It allows your mind to relax and unwind. It also enables you to tune into and concentrate on your thoughts and feelings, lessening feelings of daily stress and anxiety.

FILL YOUR TIME WITH NEW EXPERIENCES AND BREAK UP OLD ROUTINES

Nothing makes the weeks and months go by faster than doing the same thing every day. Changes in daily routines provide you with anchors to retrieve from your memory; without them, life becomes one timeless sequence of events.

The key to slowing down time is to fill your day with new experiences to form different memory anchors. You can do things like learning a new skill, embracing new ventures, or traveling to a place where you've never been. Simply do something different.



DISCONNECT TO CONNECT

Always being connected has its downfalls. The constant emails, text notifications, and internet temptations easily disrupt your focus and concentration. Always "being on" affects many things in life, including stress levels, workload, and relationships.

We are so plugged in, how can we essentially—pull the plug? You can do things like turn off your phone and put it out of sight when meeting with someone else or close your web browser, emails, and notifications so you can't check social media or other distracting websites while focusing on a task. Basically, set up temporary electronic walls.

COVID-19 taught us the importance of slowing down and appreciating the little things; let's hope that outcome is here to stay. ■

Giving Back

THE SOCIETAL AND economic effects of the pandemic have impacted Americans and people around the world in vastly different ways. While most professional services firms, such as accountants, were able to rapidly adapt and have even seen financial growth during the last year and a half, many individuals and businesses simply were not able to adapt in as efficient a manner. Likewise, the pandemic and recent changes to tax deductions for donations have also adversely affected many charitable organizations, with as many as a third now at risk of shuttering due to dwindling funds, according to a recent study (https://tinyurl.com/yskfuc25).

Fortunately, apps are making it more convenient to find and donate to charitable causes. With the new year just ahead, now's a good time to reflect on your successes, and to consider sharing some with groups that share your concerns and that are working to make at least one part of the world a little better. We previously connected with members of the CPA Practice Advisor community to see which giving apps they find useful.

"My favorite donation app is **Charity Miles**," said **Cindy Schroeder**, owner of Bright Bookkeeping. "They make donations based on how many miles you walk/run. You can make a difference by working out. It is super encouraging to get up and exercise when you know that it also helps your favorite charity."

Anne-Lise Dorry, senior director, corporate finance products at Thomson Reuters, agrees. "I like the Charity Miles app. It allows me to give back just by recording the runs (or walks) I do anyway. You download the app, choose which charity you want to run for, and get moving. You earn money for your charity of choice for each mile you log. It is both motivating and good for the community. It is literally allowing me to go the extra mile for both my health and a cause I care about."

"A friend recently introduced me to the **Be My Eyes** app," said **Karen Abramson**, CEO, Wolters Kluwer Tax and Accounting. "This app connects seeing people with people who cannot see and need immediate help with day to day things, like reading recipes, advising if a tie and shirt match, advising if a manicure was painted the right color. It's a wonderful way to help someone with a quick answer they really need and it takes only a couple of minutes of your time. It's a great example of technology connecting people and making life a little easier!"

GIVE was voted the best app in the past at the APP Showdown at the QuickBooks Connect conference in San Jose. **Geni Whitehouse**, CPA. CITP, countess of communication at Brotemarkle, Davis & Co., said, "It enables small business employers to support employee giving in an easy and very impactful way."

Clayton Oates, founder and chief solutions officer at QB Business, agrees. "It's an innovative solution that calculates and automates donations to nominated charities. The things I love is that you can establish rules (such as a % of monthly sales) and G1VE will calculate the pledge and flag it for approval based on your calculating criteria.

"I like eating and I like charity, so I was happy to learn that **Grubhub** has a feature where you can automatically round up your purchase and donate the change to support No Kid Hungry, a national campaign to end childhood hunger in America," said **Blake Oliver**, CPA, accounting community advocate at Relay Financial.

Elizabeth Pittelkow Kittner, CPA. CITP, CGMA, DTM, VP of finance and HR at International Legal Technology Association, recommends **ShareTheMeal**. "You can pick a place of need and donate money for food. It is easy and rewarding to use! The app is funded by a grant from the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and donations from businesses and individual philanthropists. Keep giving! It is important!"

Even small donations can make a big difference. **GiveTide** is an app that you link to your bank account. You can make small donations to the charity of your choice by rounding up your transactions to the next dollar.

The **Givers App** offered by **Continue to Give** allows participants to set up recurring gifts and choose from various causes. Charitable organizations can set up fundraising options through Continue to Give. "I love the ability with Continue to Give to create recurring donations to multiple charitable organizations and it allows me to manage my donations via their website or mobile app if I want to change my recurring donation dollar amount or give a one-time donation," said **Caleb Jenkins**, EA, CQP, of RLJ Financial. "I can also search on their website for a charitable organization if I want to give to a new organization."

Another option for organizations trying to set up fundraising for their causes is **CommitChange**. **Kevin Bong**, co-founder and COO of AuditFile, said "They handle the entire donation process for not-for-profits, it's pretty neat!" According to the company website, "CommitChange makes life as easy as possible for fundraising teams because your mission is important, and you need software that gets you to your goals faster." ■

Integration of QuickBooks Online and Mailchimp Create Personalized Marketing Campaigns

GETTING NEW BUSINESS, and engaging existing clients or customers is crucial in growing any company, whether it's your firm or your clients' businesses. With the vast array of multiple, unintegrated financial and marketing tools available in today's marketplace, trying to secure new business and retaining the customers you have can be overwhelming and time consuming.

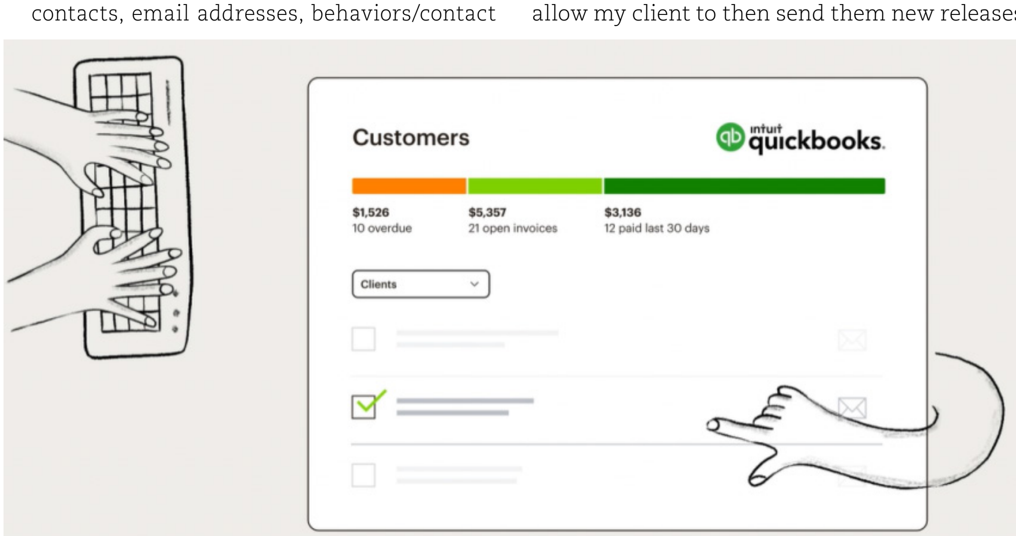
Currently in beta, Intuit's recent acquisition of Mailchimp solves this problem by providing a single source of customer sales data on one platform without the need for additional applications. Businesses are able to create more effective marketing campaigns and customer targeting at the right place and time. Campaigns also can be automated based on customer purchase data or spend activity.

There's no doubt your clients look to you to provide more than accounting and compliance, and what better way to demonstrate your expertise than to help your clients realize what else they can do in QuickBooks?

While your clients may be using competitive customer marketing programs, you can explain the various benefits by sharing the many features of the new integration:

- **Data imports from QuickBooks into Mailchimp**: QuickBooks' customer data is seamlessly imported into Mailchimp, eliminating the burden of manual entry. This includes audience(s), contacts, email addresses, behaviors/contact activity, sales receipts (total amount, product/services purchased), invoices paid, and date of purchase(s).
- **Build customer profiles with more accurate data**: View timeline activities such as campaign engagement, transaction history, and total revenue to build customer profiles.
- **Retarget existing customers**: Use purchase data or spend activity to organize contacts. Enable tags, segmentation tools, and automations, and make target marketing more effective.
- **Enable faster payments.** Customers can instantly pay invoices online with a pay now button.

"The QuickBooks Online and Mailchimp integration will be a game changer for my clients because it will allow them to be very specific in how they're marketing to their existing clients," said Kelly Gonsalves, founder and chief visionary of Totally Booked. "For example, I have a client who manufactures and sells home decor fixtures. If a customer has already purchased a piece from a specific line or series, this integration will allow my client to then send them new releases from that same line. This integration will lead to increased sales and a great customer experience. Replacing a general newsletter with a more strategic approach is a big win!"



Of course, you can integrate QuickBooks Online with Mailchimp and use it in your firm the same way clients would use it. Integrating information into Mailchimp allows for 1:1 inbox messaging, automations, building the customer journey, segmentation, and tags. For example, new contacts will be tagged as having been imported from QuickBooks Online, making it easier to identify them for targeted marketing efforts. A client will be able to use everything they know about these contacts to create segments and send targeted, personalized campaigns.

"The integration of Mailchimp into the QuickBooks platform is helping small- and mid-market businesses power their success, with QuickBooks customers importing more than 400,000 contacts into their Mailchimp accounts since July 2021 to use for customer segmentation and marketing," said Jeremy Sulzmann, vice president, developers and partners, Intuit QuickBooks. "In the coming months, a deeper integration will enable the syncing of customer purchase data between QuickBooks and Mailchimp, tailoring recommendations to help small businesses further optimize their marketing efforts."

Your clients are always looking for ways to connect with the right customers at the right time. QuickBooks with Mailchimp helps them grow their businesses faster with less effort. Learn more about this new capability and help your clients quickly improve their marketing. ■

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How a Learning Culture Can Transform Your Practice

IN THE WORLD of public accounting, clients choose your firm because they know that the team is knowledgeable, professional and experienced. There are times, though, when that expertise can hold you back. It can lead to rigid thinking when circumstances call for nimble decision making and creative solutions. Times change, and the need to keep an open mind — to continue learning — never ends. It's critical to foster a culture of ongoing learning in your organization. One of the best ways to do this is to encourage a beginner's mindset with your team.

WHAT IS A BEGINNER'S MINDSET?

Have you ever noticed how inexperienced people can sometimes be the most perceptive? For example, it's not uncommon for interns to spot a process inefficiency or an opportunity for improvement that the office veterans missed.

That's because the intern is looking at things with fresh eyes. Experienced people get acclimatized to processes over time, which means they start to filter out information they think is irrelevant. This can cause them to miss obvious areas for improvement.

A beginner's mindset is about trying to see things from an "intern's" perspective, if you will. If you can get your team into this mindset, your firm will be able to take advantage of change rather than belatedly react to it. That means you'll be ready to quickly jump on new opportunities.

One of the challenges associated with team learning is that everyone is at a different level. Some people are great with technology; others know everything about compliance. And sometimes, people don't want to let others know they're struggling with a particular topic, sensing it would undermine their authority.

When your team embraces the beginner's mindset, these insecurities fall away. Everyone is free to ask questions without judgment, and subject matter experts are encouraged to review and, if necessary, revise their most fundamental assumptions about their specialist areas.

BUILDING OUT YOUR LEARNING CULTURE

Just because you shouldn't want your team's expertise to lead to rigid thinking doesn't mean it's no longer valuable. What areas do people want to learn more about and how can you leverage collective knowledge?

- **Ask your team what they want to learn.** Address any knowledge gaps you feel exist within your team with upskilling opportunities, but also approach everyone in a group meeting or individually to ask what skills *they* want to learn or improve. Some employees might come up with areas you hadn't recognized as a skills gap, such as an emerging technology that wasn't on your radar. Deciding to provide training in that area may significantly improve your competitiveness.
- **Look for internal subject matter experts.** Your team already has an incredible amount of knowledge. But it may not be evenly distributed yet. Find out what everyone is good at and what they would be comfortable discussing with their colleagues. Everyone has something to contribute. For instance, a recent college graduate who is just beginning his or her professional life might be able to speak about subjects that trip up more seasoned colleagues, such as technology, social media or diversity (www.cpapracticeadvisor.com/21232312).
- **Build learning materials.** If possible, ask your local experts to create reusable materials, such as blogs, how-tos, wikis and videos. This kind of work can represent a major time investment on the expert's part, but the expert will be creating something that can be used in training again and again.
- **Bring in outside expertise.** If you don't have an in-house staff development group, consider bringing in external experts to train your team. Alternatively, you can look at online learning platforms like Skillshare or Udemy to see if they have suitable learning materials. Make sure to vet any external sources beforehand to ensure that they meet your standards.
- **Make learning part of a normal day.** When should you devote time to education? In a learning culture, the answer is: always. You can help make learning part of the regular routine by scheduling lunchtime seminars (virtual or on-site) or including knowledge-sharing as an agenda item on meetings. If possible, encourage people to set aside some time in their daily schedule to focus on skills development.
- **Share your wins.** A learning culture is, above all else, a culture. It is part of who you are as an organization. The team can benefit from talking to each other about what they're learning, share advice and resources, and encourage each other to continue developing. Consider starting a learning newsletter to help them do this.

- **Get senior leadership on board.** Everyone benefits from a learning culture. A beginner's mindset might even help tenured employees see the business in a new light, which could spark some valuable strategic thinking. Having senior leadership involved also sends a great message to the team — that learning really is a fundamental part of your firm's culture.

A LEARNING CULTURE IS A WIN FOR EVERYONE

Another benefit of learning cultures is increased employee engagement and retention. When people are learning, they're growing. And when they're growing, they're getting closer to achieving their professional goals. That sense of career momentum helps people feel energized about their work — and encourages them to stick with your team over the long term. ■

Getting Paid By Venmo or PayPal?

The IRS Will Know

By Ken Berry, J.D.

IF YOUR SMALL business receives payments from Venmo, PayPal or other third-party networks, you could be in for a rude surprise next year. Under a little-publicized provision in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), providers must begin reporting to the IRS business transactions totaling $600 or more, just like most employers. This could create some unexpected hassles for entrepreneurs who use one or more of these apps to conduct business.

The ARPA change takes effect on January 1, 2022. Third-party networks are gearing up for the new responsibilities.

Previously, third-party providers faced less daunting challenges. They only had to send out 1099-K forms when an account had 200 or more business transactions during the year totaling at least $20,000. The new ARPA reporting requirement broadens the application significantly.

Of course, this rule change doesn't change the tax consequences for recipients. If you receive payment for business services or goods that you furnish, you're already liable for federal income tax on that amount regardless of whether you're paid in cash or by check, credit card, app or some other means. On the flip side, you're entitled to claim deductions for your qualified business expenses that can offset the tax that you owe.

ARPA aims to clamp down on business people, particularly those operating in the gig economy like Uber and Lyft drivers and Airbnb landlords, who haven't been reporting all of their taxable business income. But rest assured it doesn't affect casual and personal transactions made through one of the third-party networks. For example, if you're being reimbursed by friends for the tab at a restaurant or for tickets to a sporting event or concert, you're in the clear. This won't result in any taxable income.

Nevertheless, the new reporting requirement could lead to some tax complications.

Notably, the third-party network may not be sure if a transaction is personal or for business. If it issues a 1099 to you for a charge in a gray area, it's up to you to prove that this isn't a taxable event if the IRS imposes tax.

What's more, you might, and probably will, receive some duplicate 1099s for the same goods or services. This could occur, for example, if you get a 1009-MISC or 1099-NEC from a customer or client and a 1099-K from the third-party provider. Again, the onus is on you to establish the existence of just one business transaction for the event.

What can you do about it? Not a whole lot for now. Expect Venmo, PayPal and the other the third-party networks to start asking for more information to clarify the nature of your transactions. (BTW: PayPal now owns Venmo.) And they will be requesting your vitals— such as an Employer Identification Number (EIN), Individual Tax ID Number (ITIN) or Social Security Number (SSN)—that they will be sharing with the IRS.

One possible solution is to use separate accounts for business and personal transactions. That will give you more credibility if the IRS ever comes calling. Bottom line: Venmo and PayPal users won't be flying under the radar any longer. ■

Ken Berry is a tax attorney and tax correspondent for CPA Practice Advisor.

AICPA News is a round-up of recent announcements from the institute.

FORENSIC AND VALUATION PROFESSIONALS HONORED

The American Institute of CPAs (AICPA) recently honored the contributions of nine CPAs during the 2021 AICPA Forensic and Valuation Services Conference held in Las Vegas.

Antonella Puca, CFA, CPA/ABV, CEIV, Lynda Schwartz, CPA, CFF, CGMA, CFE, and David Zweighaft, CPA, CFF, CFE, were named Volunteers of the Year, while six young CPAs received the Forensic and Valuation Services (FVS) Standing Ovation for significant contributions in their practice areas and their communities.

VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR

Each year, the AICPA FVS Section recognizes volunteers who have contributed greatly to the practice and profession. Schwartz and Zweighaft are recipients of the 2021 Forensic & Litigation Services (FLS) Volunteer of the Year, while Puca is the Business Valuation Volunteer of the Year.

"Antonella, Lynda, and David have been instrumental in advancing the interests of the forensic and valuation services area," said Barbara Andrews, director of forensics and technology advisory services for the AICPA. "From providing thought leadership and professional understanding to helping create new standards and credentials, their commitment cannot be understated."

STANDING OVATION PROGRAM

The Standing Ovation Program recognizes young CPAs holding the Certified in Financial Forensics (CFF) or Accredited in Business Valuation (ABV) specialty credentials who have exhibited exemplary personal achievement. The recipients in this year's class, who were honored during the AICPA Forensic and Valuation Services Conference, were recognized for their efforts to advance their fields, including volunteering at a variety of nonprofit organizations, speaking to local CPA groups, serving as volunteer experts to legal organizations and guest lecturing in college accounting classes.

"It's an honor to recognize this outstanding class of 'Standing Ovation' recipients who continue to go the extra mile to advance the profession and serve their communities," said Eve Simpson, director of valuation services for the Association. "They have offered their time to benefit their communities and the profession in a variety of ways that embody the spirit of volunteerism that the accounting profession is known for."

The 2021 list of FVS Standing Ovation recipients is in alphabetical order below:

- Shivam Jadeja, CPA, ABV, BKHM, PA, Winter Park, Fla.
- Courtney Lee, CPA, CFF, Berkeley Research Group, Washington, D.C.
- Benjamin Kincaid, CPA, CFF, Carr Riggs & Ingram, Freeport, Fla.
- Jason Schellhaas, CPA, ABV, Malcolm M. Dienes, LLC, Metairie, La.
- Matthew Krofchick, CA, CFF, Krofchick Valuations, Toronto
- Adam Hansberger, CPA, ABV, Eric J. Fernandez and Co., West Dundee, Ill. ■

AICPA HIGHLIGHTS ISSUES WITH CORP PROFIT MINIMUM TAX

The AICPA submitted a letter to Congressional tax-writing committee leadership highlighting some key issues with the corporate profits minimum tax being considered as part of the reconciliation legislation negotiations.

The corporate profits minimum tax is a minimum tax based on 15 percent of adjusted financial statement (book) income rather than recognized income. The proposed corporate minimum tax would operate much like the corporate alternative minimum tax (AMT), requiring corporations to calculate taxes, first on taxable income and then again on book income based on adjusted financial statements that include current value of assets, and pay the higher of the two.

Imposing tax according to adjusted financial statement income takes the definition of taxable income out of Congress's hands and puts it into the hands of industry regulators and others. There are key differences between adjusted financial statement income and taxable income, including the idea of materiality.

The AICPA is recommending that Congress further consider and clarify the rules associated with the Senate proposal surrounding implementing a minimum tax on corporate book income, as this will likely be complex and have many significant and potentially negative implications.

"Public policy taxation goals should not have a role in influencing accounting standards or the resulting financial reporting," the AICPA states in the letter. "Independence and objectivity of accounting standards are the backbone of our capital markets system." ■

AICPA Honors Bel Needles with Gold Medal of Distinction

The AICPA has announced Belverd (Bel) Needles, CPA, CGMA, Ph.D., as the recipient of the 2021 AICPA Gold Medal Award of Distinction.

The Gold Medal is the highest honor granted by the AICPA. Since 1944, it has been bestowed upon CPAs whose influence on the accounting profession has been especially notable. Jack Finning, CPA, CGMA, and chair of the AICPA Awards Committee, presented Needles with the award during the virtual fall meeting of AICPA's governing Council.

"Bel has had a tremendous impact on the profession that spanned the length of his impressive career," said Finning. "His work as an educator and volunteer with the AICPA and the Illinois Society of CPAs has positively influenced countless students on their journey towards earning their CPA and entering the profession."

Needles has spent more than 40 years at DePaul University, where he was one of the founding Directors of the School of Accountancy and currently serves as EY Distinguished Professor of Accountancy. He was the key driver of adding Management Information Systems (MIS) to the Accountancy curriculum and the establishment of the School of Accountancy & MIS. He developed the first combined 150-hour undergraduate and graduate program in Illinois in response to the new CPA requirement. His influence on global accounting and finance students endures through his textbooks and publications in leading journals. Today, he is a founding Principal of Needles & Powers, Inc., which provides educational resources and programs to Fortune 1000 corporations, consulting firms and investment companies. ■

6 Tips for Managing Technostress

WHERE WOULD WE be without technology? It allows us to work from anywhere, communicate with people across the globe in an instant, and get more done in less time than we've ever dreamed possible. But there's a downside: technostress. You and your team may be feeling it even if you've never heard the term before. And it's important to learn how to manage it if we want to continue moving our firms and our people forward.

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WHAT IS TECHNOSTRESS?

Technostress is the stress and negative psychological impact of introducing new technologies at work, in life and in play. It can impact our health in several ways: emotional, social, mental and cultural. The explosion of video conferencing, instant messaging, social media and other cloud-based tools might seem like the obvious culprit, but technostress isn't new. It was first used in 1984 in response to the widespread adoption of computers in the workplace.

5 TYPES OF TECHNO-STRESSORS

Technostress usually comes from four different areas:

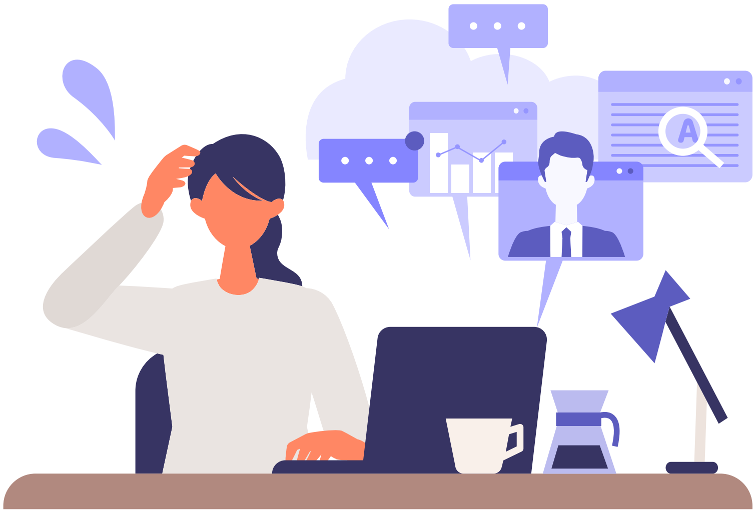
- **Techno-invasion.** Feeling like you always need to be available due to technology, you must sacrifice time to keep current on new technologies, and your personal life is being invaded by technology.
- **Techno-overload.** Feeling like you're forced to do more work than you can handle or forced to work with very tight time schedules due to technology.
- **Techno-complexity.** Feeling like you don't know enough about a new technology to handle it satisfactorily or don't have enough time to study and upgrade your technology skills.
- **Techno-uncertainty.** Feeling like continual technological progress and shorter lifecycles for computers and other devices means your knowledge is constantly out-of-date.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF TECHNOSTRESS

It can be difficult to recognize the signs and symptoms of technostress because the response is the same for other types of stress. Do you recognize any of the following in yourself or your team members?

- **Physical:** Frequent headaches, soreness, fatigue or an inability to relax
- **Mental:** Increased errors, lower productivity, concentration problems and low morale
- **Emotional:** Panic attacks, anxiety, an isolationist attitude and reduced job satisfaction

If you see these signs, it's crucial to address technostress. Ignoring the problem can lead to exhaustion and burnout, which can lead to disengagement and turnover.



MANAGING TECHNOSTRESS

Fortunately, there are ways to manage technostress that don't require going back to 12-column ledgers or paper routing sheets. In fact, the regular use of technology *in the right way* can build coping skills. Here are some tips for managing technostress in your team.

- **Assess the stress.** The first step is to get a clear picture of the current situation in your firm. Consider sending a short monthly survey to your team using a tool like SurveyMonkey to get an idea of where people are struggling.
- **Increase awareness.** The concept of technostress isn't new, but it's one many people are unfamiliar with. Talk to your team about technostress, its causes and symptoms. Make sure people know they can speak up if they're struggling or feel like they need additional training.
- **Set and protect boundaries.** Most of us have felt the pull to respond to emails on evenings and weekends, and the situation often gets worse when people work from home. As a leader in your firm, set an example by taking the time to disconnect from work and not sending emails at all hours.
- **Improve technology training.** Supplying proper training on new tools and systems can alleviate feelings of techno-complexity and techno-uncertainty.
- **Update your processes to align with new technologies.** Shoving new technology into ineffective processes won't make your team more productive. In fact, it often has the opposite effect. Each time you introduce new technology, it's crucial to review and update your processes.
- **Reduce unnecessary communications.** Video conferencing, email, instant messaging, workflow applications and other tools allow us to communicate anytime, anywhere. But without guidelines around which tools to use for which purpose, they can lead to communication overload and stress people out.

Getting a handle on technostress will only become more necessary as our workplaces become increasingly digital. Make sure everyone in your firm is aware of the causes and effects of technostress and take steps to mitigate them. This will help protect your team and keep them happy, healthy and productive. ■

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

CPA Practice Advisor

THEME: Focus Your Firm

IN EVERY ISSUE

THOUGHTLEADER COLUMNS
Insight and practice guidance from the top thought leaders serving the accounting profession.

AICPA NEWS
A round up of recent association news and events.

ON THE CALENDAR

January 1	New Year's Day
January 10	NCAA Football Championship
January 15	National Bagel Day
January 17	Martin Luther King Jr. Day
February 21	Presidents' Day

ON YOUR TIME

LEARN SOMETHING NEW:
Largest online platform of free art.
https://artsandculture.google.com

SUPPORT A WORTHY CAUSE:
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